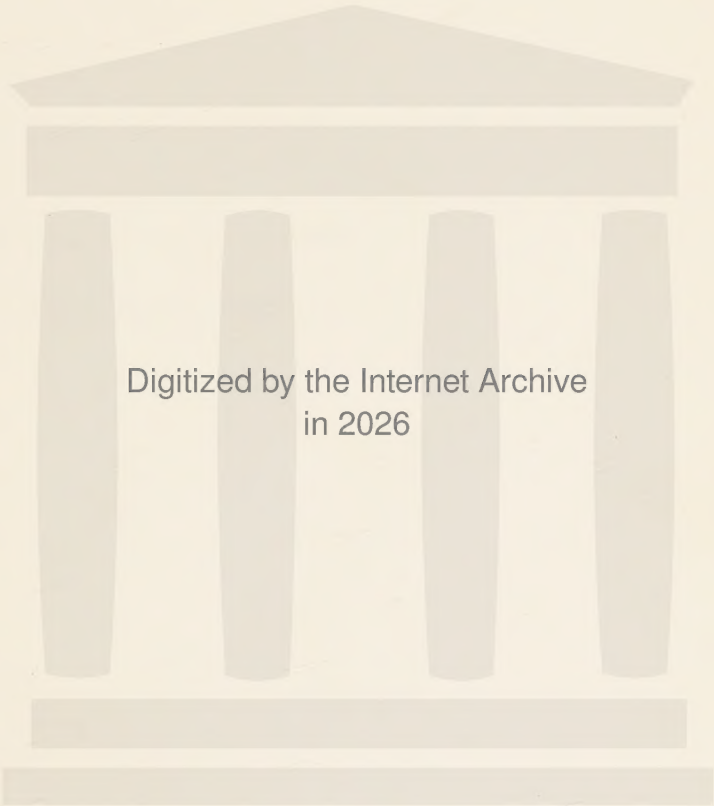
BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY

Bought from the income of the gift,

received in 1882, of

ALEXANDER M. WHITE


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/poeticalworks0000robe_o9a5

ROBERT BROWNING'S
POETICAL WORKS

VOL. XI.

THE POETICAL WORKS

of

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. XI.

BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE
PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU
FIFINE AT THE FAIR

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1889

BROOKLYN
PUBLIC LIBRARY
3640919

821
B88 Po 3
V. 11

This Edition, printed on hand-made paper, consists of two hundred and fifty copies

BROOKLYN
PUBLIC LIBRARY

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE	1
PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU	123
FIFINE AT THE FAIR	211

BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE;

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES

TO THE COUNTESS COWPER.

If I mention the simple truth: that this poem absolutely owes its existence to you,—who not only suggested, but imposed on me as a task, what has proved the most delightful of May-month amusements —I shall seem honest, indeed, but hardly prudent; for, how good and beautiful ought such a poem to be!

Euripides might fear little; but I, also, have an interest in the performance; and what wonder if I beg you to suffer that it make, in another and far easier sense, its nearest possible approach to those Greek qualities of goodness and beauty, by laying itself gratefully at your feet?

R. B.

London: July 23, 1871.

OUR EURIPIDES, THE HUMAN,
WITH HIS DROPPINGS OF WARM TEARS,
AND HIS TOUCHES OF THINGS COMMON
TILL THEY ROSE TO TOUCH THE SPHERES.

BALAUSTION'S ADVENTURE.

1871.

About that strangest, saddest, sweetest song
I, when a girl, heard in Kameiros once,
And, after, saved my life by? Oh, so glad
To tell you the adventure!
Petalé,
Phullis, Charopé, Chrusion! You must know,
This "after" fell in that unhappy time
When poor reluctant Nikias, pushed by fate,
Went falteringly against Syracuse;
And there shamed Athens, lost her ships and men,
And gained a grave, or death without a grave.
I was at Rhodes—the isle, not Rhodes the town,
Mine was Kameiros—when the news arrived:
Our people rose in tumult, cried "No more
Duty to Athens, let us join the League
And side with Sparta, share the spoil,—at worst,

Abjure a headship that will ruin Greece!"
And so, they sent to Knidos for a fleet
To come and help revolters. Ere help came,—
Girl as I was, and never out of Rhodes
The whole of my first fourteen years of life,
But nourished with Ilissian mother's-milk,—
I passionately cried to who would hear
And those who loved me at Kameiros—"No!
Never throw Athens off for Sparta's sake—
Never disloyal to the life and light
Of the whole world worth calling world at all!
Rather go die at Athens, lie outstretched
For feet to trample on, before the gate
Of Diomedes or the Hippadai,
Before the temples and among the tombs,
Than tolerate the grim felicity
Of harsh Lakonia! Ours the fasts and feasts,
Choës and Chutroi; ours the sacred grove,
Agora, Dikasteria, Poikilé,
Pnux, Keramikos; Salamis in sight,
Psuttalia, Marathon itself, not far!
Ours the great Dionusiac theatre,
And tragic triad of immortal fames,
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides!
To Athens, all of us that have a soul,
Follow me!" And I wrought so with my prayer,

That certain of my kinsfolk crossed the strait
And found a ship at Kaunos; well-disposed
Because the Captain—where did he draw breath
First but within Psuttalia? Thither fled
A few like-minded as ourselves. We turned
The glad prow westward, soon were out at sea,
Pushing, brave ship with the vermilion cheek,
Proud for our heart's true harbour. But a wind
Lay ambushed by Point Malea of bad fame,
And leapt out, bent us from our course. Next day
Broke stormless, so broke next blue day and next.
"But whither bound in this white waste?" we plagued
The pilot's old experience: "Cos or Crete?"
Because he promised us the land ahead.
While we strained eyes to share in what he saw,
The Captain's shout startled us; round we rushed:
What hung behind us but a pirate-ship
Panting for the good prize! "Row! harder row!
Row for dear life!" the Captain cried: "'t is Crete,
Friendly Crete looming large there! Beat this craft
That 's but a keles, one-benched pirate-bark,
Lokrian, or that bad breed off Thessaly!
Only, so cruel are such water-thieves,
No man of you, no woman, child, or slave,
But falls their prey, once let them board our boat!"
So, furiously our oarsmen rowed and rowed;

And when the oars flagged somewhat, dash and dip,
As we approached the coast and safety, so
That we could hear behind us plain the threats
And curses of the pirate panting up
In one more throe and passion of pursuit,—
Seeing our oars flag in the rise and fall,
I sprang upon the altar by the mast
And sang aloft,—some genius prompting me,—
That song of ours which saved at Salamis:
"O sons of Greeks, go, set your country free,
Free your wives, free your children, free the fanes
O' the Gods, your fathers founded,—sepulchres
They sleep in! Or save all, or all be lost!"
Then, in a frenzy, so the noble oars
Churned the black water white, that well away
We drew, soon saw land rise, saw hills grow up,
Saw spread itself a sea-wide town with towers,
Not fifty stadia distant; and, betwixt
A large bay and a small, the islet-bar,
Even Ortugia's self—oh, luckless we!
For here was Sicily and Syracuse:
We ran upon the lion from the wolf.
Ere we drew breath, took counsel, out there came
A galley, hailed us. "Who asks entry here
In war-time? Are you Sparta's friend or foe?"
"Kaunians"—our Captain judged his best reply,

"The mainland-seaport that belongs to Rhodes;
Rhodes that casts in her lot now with the League,
Forsaking Athens,—you have heard belike!"
"Ay, but we heard all Athens in one ode
Just now! we heard her in that Aischulos!
You bring a boatful of Athenians here,
Kaunians although you be: and prudence bids,
For Kaunos' sake, why, carry them unhurt
To Kaunos, if you will: for Athens' sake,
Back must you, though ten pirates blocked the bay!
We want no colony from Athens here,
With memories of Salamis, forsooth,
To spirit up our captives, that pale crowd
I' the quarry, whom the daily pint of corn
Keeps in good order and submissiveness."
Then the grey Captain prayed them by the Gods,
And by their own knees, and their fathers' beards,
They should not wickedly thrust suppliants back,
But save the innocent on traffic bound—
Or, may be, some Athenian family
Perishing of desire to die at home,—
From that vile foe still lying on its oars,
Waiting the issue in the distance. Vain!
Words to the wind! And we were just about
To turn and face the foe, as some tired bird
Barbarians pelt at, drive with shouts away

From shelter in what rocks, however rude,
She makes for, to escape the kindled eye,
Split beak, crook'd claw o' the creature, cormorant
Or ossifrage, that, hardly baffled, hangs
Afloat i' the foam, to take her if she turn.
So were we at destruction's very edge,
When those o' the galley, as they had discussed
A point, a question raised by somebody,
A matter mooted in a moment,—"Wait!"
Cried they (and wait we did, you may be sure).
"That song was veritable Aischulos,
Familiar to the mouth of man and boy,
Old glory: how about Euripides?
The newer and not yet so famous bard,
He that was born upon the battle-day
While that song and the salpinx sounded him
Into the world, first sound, at Salamis—
Might you know any of his verses too?"

Now, some one of the Gods inspired this speech:
Since ourselves knew what happened but last year—
How, when Gulippos gained his victory
Over poor Nikias, poor Demosthenes,
And Syracuse condemned the conquered force
To dig and starve i' the quarry, branded them–
Freeborn Athenians, brute-like in the front

With horse-head brands,—ah, "Region of the Steed"!—
Of all these men immersed in misery,
It was found none had been advantaged so
By aught in the past life he used to prize
And pride himself concerning,—no rich man
By riches, no wise man by wisdom, no
Wiser man still (as who loved more the Muse)
By storing, at brain's edge and tip of tongue,
Old glory, great plays that had long ago
Made themselves wings to fly about the world,—
Not one such man was helped so at his need
As certain few that (wisest they of all)
Had, at first summons, oped heart, flung door wide
At the new knocking of Euripides,
Nor drawn the bolt with who cried "Decadence!
And, after Sophokles, be nature dumb!"
Such,—and I see in it God Bacchos' boon
To souls that recognized his latest child,
He who himself, born latest of the Gods,
Was stoutly held impostor by mankind,—
Such were in safety: any who could speak
A chorus to the end, or prologize,
Roll out a rhesis, wield some golden length
Stiffened by wisdom out into a line,
Or thrust and parry in bright monostich,
Teaching Euripides to Syracuse—

Any such happy man had prompt reward:
If he lay bleeding on the battle-field
They staunched his wounds and gave him drink and food;
If he were slave i' the house, for reverence
They rose up, bowed to who proved master now,
And bade him go free, thank Euripides!
Ay, and such did so: many such, he said,
Returning home to Athens, sought him out,
The old bard in the solitary house,
And thanked him ere they went to sacrifice.
I say, we knew that story of last year!

Therefore, at mention of Euripides,
The Captain crowed out "Euoi, praise the God!
Oöp, boys, bring our owl-shield to the fore!
Out with our Sacred Anchor! Here she stands,
Balaustion! Strangers, greet the lyric girl!
Euripides? Babai! what a word there 'scaped
Your teeth's enclosure, quoth my grandsire's song!
Why, fast as snow in Thrace, the voyage through,
Has she been falling thick in flakes of him!
Frequent as figs at Kaunos, Kaunians said.
Balaustion, stand forth and confirm my speech!
Now it was some whole passion of a play;
Now, peradventure, but a honey-drop

That slipt its comb i' the chorus. If there rose
A star, before I could determine steer
Southward or northward—if a cloud surprised
Heaven, ere I fairly hollaed 'Furl the sail!—'
She had at fingers' end both cloud and star;
Some thought that perched there, tame and tuneable,
Fitted with wings; and still, as off it flew,
'So sang Euripides,' she said, 'so sang
The meteoric poet of air and sea,
Planets and the pale populace of heaven,
The mind of man, and all that 's made to soar!'
And so, although she has some other name,
We only call her Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Balaustion; since, where'er the red bloom burns
I' the dull dark verdure of the bounteous tree,
Dethroning, in the Rosy Isle, the rose,
You shall find food, drink, odour, all at once;
Cool leaves to bind about an aching brow,
And, never much away, the nightingale.
Sing them a strophe, with the turn-again,
Down to the verse that ends all, proverb-like,
And save us, thou Balaustion, bless the name!"

But I cried "Brother Greek! better than so,—
Save us, and I have courage to recite
The main of a whole play from first to last;

That strangest, saddest, sweetest song of his,
ALKESTIS; which was taught, long years ago
At Athens, in Glaukinos' archonship,
But only this year reached our Isle o' the Rose.
I saw it, at Kameiros, played the same,
They say, as for the right Lenean feast
In Athens; and beside the perfect piece—
Its beauty and the way it makes you weep,—
There is much honour done your own loved God
Herakles, whom you house i' the city here
Nobly, the Temple wide Greece talks about!
I come a suppliant to your Herakles!
Take me and put me on his temple-steps
To tell you his achievement as I may,
And, that told, he shall bid you set us free!"

Then, because Greeks are Greeks, and hearts are hearts,
And poetry is power,—they all outbroke
In a great joyous laughter with much love:
"Thank Herakles for the good holiday!
Make for the harbour! Row, and let voice ring,
'In we row, bringing more Euripides!'"
All the crowd, as they lined the harbour now,
"More of Euripides!"—took up the cry.
We landed; the whole city, soon astir,
Came rushing out of gates in common joy

To the suburb temple; there they stationed me
O' the topmost step: and plain I told the play,
Just as I saw it; what the actors said,
And what I saw, or thought I saw the while,
At our Kameiros theatre, clean-scooped
Out of a hill-side, with the sky above
And sea before our seats in marble row:
Told it, and, two days more, repeated it,
Until they sent us on our way again
With good words and great wishes.
Oh, for me—
A wealthy Syracusan brought a whole
Talent and bade me take it for myself:
I left it on the tripod in the fane,
—For had not Herakles a second time
Wrestled with Death and saved devoted ones?—
Thank-offering to the hero. And a band
Of captives, whom their lords grew kinder to
Because they called the poet countryman,
Sent me a crown of wild-pomegranate-flower:
So, I shall live and die Balaustion now.
But one—one man—one youth,—three days, each day,—
(If, ere I lifted up my voice to speak,
I gave a downward glance by accident)
Was found at foot o' the temple. When we sailed,
There, in the ship too, was he found as well,

Having a hunger to see Athens too.
We reached Peiraieus; when I landed—lo,
He was beside me. Anthesterion-month
Is just commencing: when its moon rounds full,
We are to marry. O Euripides!

I saw the master: when we found ourselves
(Because the young man needs must follow me)
Firm on Peiraieus, I demanded first
Whither to go and find him. Would you think?
The story how he saved us made some smile:
They wondered strangers were exorbitant
In estimation of Euripides.
He was not Aischulos nor Sophokles:
—"Then, of our younger bards who boast the bay,
Had I sought Agathon, or Iophon,
Or, what now had it been Kephisophon?
A man that never kept good company,
The most unsociable of poet-kind,
All beard that was not freckle in his face!"

I soon was at the tragic house, and saw
The master, held the sacred hand of him
And laid it to my lips. Men love him not:
How should they? Nor do they much love his friend
Sokrates: but those two have fellowship:

Sokrates often comes to hear him read,
And never misses if he teach a piece.
Both, being old, will soon have company,
Sit with their peers above the talk. Meantime,
He lives as should a statue in its niche;
Cold walls enclose him, mostly darkness there,
Alone, unless some foreigner uncouth
Breaks in, sits, stares an hour, and so departs,
Brain-stuffed with something to sustain his life,
Dry to the marrow mid much merchandise.
How should such know and love the man?
Why, mark!
Even when I told the play and got the praise,
There spoke up a brisk little somebody,
Critic and whippersnapper, in a rage
To set things right: "The girl departs from truth!
Pretends she saw what was not to be seen,
Making the mask of the actor move, forsooth!
'Then a fear flitted o'er the wife's white face,'—
'Then frowned the father,'—'then the husband shook,'—
'Then from the festal forehead slipt each spray,
'And the heroic mouth's gay grace was gone;'—
As she had seen each naked fleshly face,
And not the merely-painted mask it wore!"
Well, is the explanation difficult?
What 's poetry except a power that makes?

And, speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,
Pressing them all into its service; so
That who sees painting, seems to hear as well
The speech that 's proper for the painted mouth;
And who hears music, feels his solitude
Peopled at once—for how count heart-beats plain
Unless a company, with hearts which beat,
Come close to the musician, seen or no?
And who receives true verse at eye or ear,
Takes in (with verse) time, place, and person too,
So, links each sense on to its sister-sense,
Grace-like: and what if but one sense of three
Front you at once? The sidelong pair conceive
Thro' faintest touch of finest finger-tips,—
Hear, see and feel, in faith's simplicity,
Alike, what one was sole recipient of:
Who hears the poem, therefore, sees the play.

Enough and too much! Hear the play itself!
Under the grape-vines, by the streamlet-side,
Close to Baccheion; till the cool increase,
And other stars steal on the evening-star,
And so, we homeward flock i' the dusk, we five!
You will expect, no one of all the words
O' the play but is grown part now of my soul,
Since the adventure. 'T is the poet speaks:

But if I, too, should try and speak at times,
Leading your love to where my love, perchance,
Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew—
Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake!
Look at Baccheion's beauty opposite,
The temple with the pillars at the porch!
See you not something beside masonry?
What if my words wind in and out the stone
As yonder ivy, the God's parasite?
Though they leap all the way the pillar leads,
Festoon about the marble, foot to frieze,
And serpentiningly enrich the roof,
Toy with some few bees and a bird or two,—
What then? The column holds the cornice up.

There slept a silent palace in the sun,
With plains adjacent and Thessalian peace—
Pherai, where King Admetos ruled the land.

Out from the portico there gleamed a God,
Apollon: for the bow was in his hand,
The quiver at his shoulder, all his shape
One dreadful beauty. And he hailed the house
As if he knew it well and loved it much:
"O Admeteian domes, where I endured,

Even the God I am, to drudge awhile,
Do righteous penance for a reckless deed,
Accepting the slaves' table thankfully!"
Then told how Zeus had been the cause of all,
Raising the wrath in him which took revenge
And slew those forgers of the thunderbolt
Wherewith Zeus blazed the life from out the breast
Of Phoibos' son Asklepios (I surmise,
Because he brought the dead to life again)
And so, for punishment, must needs go slave,
God as he was, with a mere mortal lord:
—Told how he came to King Admetos' land,
And played the ministrant, was herdsman there,
Warding all harm away from him and his
Till now; "For, holy as I am," said he,
"The lord I chanced upon was holy too:
Whence I deceived the Moirai, drew from death
My master, this same son of Pheres,—ay,
The Goddesses conceded him escape
From Hades, when the fated day should fall,
Could he exchange lives, find some friendly one
Ready, for his sake, to content the grave.
But trying all in turn, the friendly list,
Why, he found no one, none who loved so much,
Nor father, nor the aged mother's self
That bore him, no, not any save his wife,

Willing to die instead of him and watch
Never a sunrise nor a sunset more:
And she is even now within the house,
Upborne by pitying hands, the feeble frame
Gasping its last of life out; since to-day
Destiny is accomplished, and she dies,
And I, lest here pollution light on me,
Leave, as ye witness, all my wonted joy
In this dear dwelling. Ay,—for here comes Death
Close on us of a sudden! who, pale priest
Of the mute people, means to bear his prey
To the house of Hades. The symmetric step!
How he treads true to time and place and thing,
Dogging day, hour and minute, for death's-due!"

And we observed another Deity,
Half in, half out the portal,—watch and ward,—
Eyeing his fellow: formidably fixed,
Yet faltering too at who affronted him,
As somehow disadvantaged, should they strive.
Like some dread heapy blackness, ruffled wing,
Convulsed and cowering head that is all eye,
Which proves a ruined eagle who, too blind
Swooping in quest o' the quarry, fawn or kid,
Descried deep down the chasm 'twixt rock and rock,
Has wedged and mortised, into either wall

O' the mountain, the pent earthquake of his power;
So lies, half hurtless yet still terrible,
Just when—who stalks up, who stands front to front,
But the great lion-guarder of the gorge,
Lord of the ground, a stationed glory there?
Yet he too pauses ere he try the worst
O' the frightful unfamiliar nature, new
To the chasm, indeed, but elsewhere known enough,
Among the shadows and the silences
Above i' the sky: so each antagonist
Silently faced his fellow and forbore.
Till Death shrilled, hard and quick, in spite and fear:

"Ha ha, and what mayst thou do at the domes,
Why hauntest here, thou Phoibos? Here again
At the old injustice, limiting our rights,
Baulking of honour due us Gods o' the grave?
Was 't not enough for thee to have delayed
Death from Admetos,—with thy crafty art
Cheating the very Fates,—but thou must arm
The bow-hand and take station, press 'twixt me
And Pelias' daughter, who then saved her spouse,—
Did just that, now thou comest to undo,—
Taking his place to die, Alkestis here?"

But the God sighed "Have courage! All my arms,

This time, are simple justice and fair words."

Then each plied each with rapid interchange:

"What need of bow, were justice arms enough?"

"Ever it is my wont to bear the bow."

"Ay, and with bow, not justice, help this house!"

"I help it, since a friend's woe weighs me too."

"And now,—wilt force from me this second corpse?"

"By force I took no corpse at first from thee."

"How then is he above ground, not beneath?"

"He gave his wife instead of him, thy prey."

"And prey, this time at least, I bear below!"

"Go take her!—for I doubt persuading thee . . .'

"To kill the doomed one? What my function else?"

"No! Rather, to despatch the true mature."

"Truly I take thy meaning, see thy drift!"

"Is there a way then she may reach old age?"

"No way! I glad me in my honours too!"

"But, young or old, thou tak'st one life, no more!"

"Younger they die, greater my praise redounds!"

"If she die old,—the sumptuous funeral!"

"Thou layest down a law the rich would like."

"How so? Did wit lurk there and 'scape thy sense?"

"Who could buy substitutes would die old men."

"It seems thou wilt not grant me, then, this grace?"

"This grace I will not grant: thou know'st my ways."

"Ways harsh to men, hateful to Gods, at least!"

"All things thou canst not have: my rights for me!"

And then Apollon prophesied,—I think,
More to himself than to impatient Death,
Who did not hear or would not heed the while,—
For he went on to say "Yet even so,
Cruel above the measure, thou shalt clutch
No life here! Such a man do I perceive
Advancing to the house of Pheres now,
Sent by Eurustheus to bring out of Thrace,
The winter world, a chariot with its steeds!
He indeed, when Admetos proves the host,
And he the guest, at the house here,—he it is
Shall bring to bear such force, and from thy hands
Rescue this woman. Grace no whit to me
Will that prove, since thou dost thy deed the same,
And earnest too my hate, and all for nought!"

But how should Death or stay or understand?
Doubtless, he only felt the hour was come,
And the sword free; for he but flung some taunt—
"Having talked much, thou wilt not gain the more!
This woman, then, descends to Hades' hall
Now that I rush on her, begin the rites
O' the sword; for sacred, to us Gods below,
That head whose hair this sword shall sanctify!"

And, in the fire-flash of the appalling sword,

The uprush and the outburst, the onslaught
Of Death's portentous passage through the door,
Apollon stood a pitying moment-space:
I caught one last gold gaze upon the night
Nearing the world now: and the God was gone,
And mortals left to deal with misery,
As in came stealing slow, now this, now that
Old sojourner throughout the country-side,
Servants grown friends to those unhappy here:
And, cloudlike in their increase, all these griefs
Broke and began the over-brimming wail,
Out of a common impulse, word by word.

"What now may mean the silence at the door?
Why is Admetos' mansion stricken dumb?
Not one friend near, to say if we should mourn
Our mistress dead, or if Alkestis lives
And sees the light still, Pelias' child—to me,
To all, conspicuously the best of wives
That ever was toward husband in this world!
Hears anyone or wail beneath the roof,
Or hands that strike each other, or the groan
Announcing all is done and nought to dread?
Still not a servant stationed at the gates!
O Paian, that thou wouldst dispart the wave
O' the woe, be present! Yet, had woe o'erwhelmed

The housemates, they were hardly silent thus:
It cannot be, the dead is forth and gone.
Whence comes thy gleam of hope? I dare not hope:
What is the circumstance that heartens thee?
How could Admetos have dismissed a wife
So worthy, unescorted to the grave?
Before the gates I see no hallowed vase
Of fountain-water, such as suits death's door;
Nor any clipt locks strew the vestibule,
Though surely these drop when we grieve the dead,
Nor hand sounds smitten against youthful hand,
The women's way. And yet—the appointed time—
How speak the word?—this day is even the day
Ordained her for departing from its light.
O touch calamitous to heart and soul!
Needs must one, when the good are tortured so,
Sorrow,—one reckoned faithful from the first."

Then their souls rose together, and one sigh
Went up in cadence from the common mouth:
How "Vainly—anywhither in the world
Directing or land-labour or sea-search—
To Lukia or the sand-waste, Ammon's seat—
Might you set free their hapless lady's soul
From the abrupt Fate's footstep instant now
Not a sheep-sacrificer at the hearths

Of Gods had they to go to: one there was
Who, if his eyes saw light still,—Phoibos' son,—
Had wrought so she might leave the shadowy place
And Hades' portal; for he propped up Death's
Subdued ones till the Zeus-flung thunder-flame
Struck him; and now what hope of life were hailed
With open arms? For, all the king could do
Is done already,—not one God whereof
The altar fails to reek with sacrifice:
And for assuagement of these evils—nought!"

But here they broke off, for a matron moved
Forth from the house: and, as her tears flowed fast,
They gathered round. "What fortune shall we hear?
For mourning thus, if aught affect thy lord,
We pardon thee: but lives the lady yet
Or has she perished?—that we fain would know!"

"Call her dead, call her living, each style serves,"
The matron said: "though grave-ward bowed, she breathed;
Nor knew her husband what the misery meant
Before he felt it: hope of life was none:
The appointed day pressed hard; the funeral pomp
He had prepared too."

When the friends broke out:

"Let her in dying know herself at least
Sole wife, of all the wives 'neath the sun wide,
For glory and for goodness!"—"Ah, how else
Than best? who controverts the claim?" quoth she:
"What kind of creature should the woman prove
That has surpassed Alkestis?—surelier shown
Preference for her husband to herself
Than by determining to die for him?
But so much all our city knows indeed:
Hear what she did indoors and wonder then!
For, when she felt the crowning day was come,
She washed with river-waters her white skin,
And, taking from the cedar closets forth
Vesture and ornament, bedecked herself
Nobly, and stood before the hearth, and prayed:
'Mistress, because I now depart the world,
Falling before thee the last time, I ask—
Be mother to my orphans! wed the one
To a kind wife, and make the other's mate
Some princely person: nor, as I who bore
My children perish, suffer that they too
Die all untimely, but live, happy pair,
Their full glad life out in the fatherland!'
And every altar through Admetos' house
She visited and crowned and prayed before,
Stripping the myrtle-foliage from the boughs,

Without a tear, without a groan,—no change
At all to that skin's nature, fair to see,
Caused by the imminent evil. But this done—
Reaching her chamber, falling on her bed,
There, truly, burst she into tears and spoke:
'O bride-bed, where I loosened from my life
Virginity for that same husband's sake
Because of whom I die now—fare thee well!
Since nowise do I hate thee: me alone
Hast thou destroyed; for, shrinking to betray
Thee and my spouse, I die: but thee, O bed,
Some other woman shall possess as wife—
Truer, no! but of better fortune, say!'
—So falls on, kisses it till all the couch
Is moistened with the eyes' sad overflow.
But, when of many tears she had her fill,
She flings from off the couch, goes headlong forth,
Yet,—forth the chamber,—still keeps turning back
And casts her on the couch again once more.
Her children, clinging to their mother's robe,
Wept meanwhile: but she took them in her arms,
And, as a dying woman might, embraced
Now one and now the other: 'neath the roof,
All of the household servants wept as well,
Moved to compassion for their mistress; she
Extended her right hand to all and each,

And there was no one of such low degree
She spoke not to nor had an answer from.
Such are the evils in Admetos' house.
Dying,—why, he had died; but, living, gains
Such grief as this he never will forget!"

And when they questioned of Admetos, "Well—
Holding his dear wife in his hands, he weeps;
Entreats her not to give him up, and seeks
The impossible, in fine: for there she wastes
And withers by disease, abandoned now,
A mere dead weight upon her husband's arm.
Yet, none the less, although she breathe so faint,
Her will is to behold the beams o' the sun:
Since never more again, but this last once,
Shall she see sun, its circlet or its ray.
But I will go, announce your presence,—friends
Indeed; since 't is not all so love their lords
As seek them in misfortune, kind the same:
But you are the old friends I recognise."

And at the word she turned again to go:
The while they waited, taking up the plaint
To Zeus again: "What passage from this strait?
What loosing of the heavy fortune fast
About the palace? Will such help appear,

Or must we clip the locks and cast around
Each form already the black peplos' fold?
Clearly the black robe, clearly! All the same,
Pray to the Gods!—like Gods' no power so great!
O thou king Paian, find some way to save!
Reveal it, yea, reveal it! Since of old
Thou found'st a cure, why, now again becom
Releaser from the bonds of Death, we beg,
And give the sanguinary Hades pause!"
So the song dwindled into a mere moan,
How dear the wife, and what her husband's woe;
When suddenly—
"Behold, behold!" breaks forth:
"Here is she coming from the house indeed!
Her husband comes, too! Cry aloud, lament,
Pheraian land, this best of women, bound—
So is she withered by disease away—
For realms below and their infernal king!
Never will we affirm there's more of joy
Than grief in marriage; making estimate
Both from old sorrows anciently observed,
And this misfortune of the king we see—
Admetos who, of bravest spouse bereaved,
Will live life's remnant out, no life at all!"

So wailed they, while a sad procession wound

Slow from the innermost o' the palace, stopped
At the extreme verge of the platform-front:
There opened, and disclosed Alkestis' self,
The consecrated lady, borne to look
Her last—and let the living look their last—
She at the sun, we at Alkestis.
We!
For would you note a memorable thing?
We grew to see in that severe regard,—
Hear in that hard dry pressure to the point,
Word slow pursuing word in monotone,—
What Death meant when he called her consecrate
Henceforth to Hades. I believe, the sword—
Its office was to cut the soul at once
From life,—from something in this world which hides
Truth, and hides falsehood, and so lets us live
Somehow. Suppose a rider furls a cloak
About a horse's head; unfrightened, so,
Between the menace of a flame, between
Solicitation of the pasturage,
Untempted equally, he goes his gait
To journey's end: then pluck the pharos off!
Show what delusions steadied him i' the straight
O' the path, made grass seem fire and fire seem
grass,
All through a little bandage o'er the eyes!

As certainly with eyes unbandaged now
Alkestis looked upon the action here,
Self-immolation for Admetos' sake;
Saw, with a new sense, all her death would do,
And which of her survivors had the right,
And which the less right, to survive thereby.
For, you shall note, she uttered no one word
Of love more to her husband, though he wept
Plenteously, waxed importunate in prayer—
Folly's old fashion when its seed bears fruit.
I think she judged that she had bought the ware
O' the seller at its value,—nor praised him
Nor blamed herself, but, with indifferent eye,
Saw him purse money up, prepare to leave
The buyer with a solitary bale—
True purple—but in place of all that coin,
Had made a hundred others happy too,
If so willed fate or fortune! What remained
To give away, should rather go to these
Than one with coin to clink and contemplate.
Admetos had his share and might depart,
The rest was for her children and herself.
(Charopé makes a face: but wait awhile!)
She saw things plain as Gods do: by one stroke
O' the sword that rends the life-long veil away.
(Also Euripides saw plain enough:

But you and I, Charopé!—you and I
Will trust his sight until our own grow clear.)

"Sun, and thou light of day, and heavenly dance
O' the fleet cloud-figure!" (so her passion paused,
While the awe-stricken husband made his moan,
Muttered now this now that ineptitude:
"Sun that sees thee and me, a suffering pair,
Who did the Gods no wrong whence thou shouldst
die!")
Then, as if caught up, carried in their course,
Fleeting and free as cloud and sunbeam are,
She missed no happiness that lay beneath:
"O thou wide earth, from these my palace roofs,
To distant nuptial chambers once my own
In that Iolkos of my ancestry!"—
There the flight failed her. "Raise thee, wretched one!
Give us not up! Pray pity from the Gods!"

Vainly Admetos: for "I see it—see
The two-oared boat! The ferryer of the dead,
Charon, hand hard upon the boatman's-pole,
Calls me—even now calls—'Why delayest thou?
Quick! Thou obstructest all made ready here
For prompt departure: quick, then!'"
"Woe is me!

A bitter voyage this to undergo,
Even i' the telling! Adverse Powers above,
How do ye plague us!"
Then a shiver ran:
"He has me—seest not?—hales me,—who is it?—
To the hall o' the Dead—ah, who but Hades' self,
He, with the wings there, glares at me, one gaze
All that blue brilliance, under the eyebrow!
What wilt thou do? Unhand me! Such a way
I have to traverse, all unhappy one!"

"Way—piteous to thy friends, but, most of all,
Me and thy children: ours assuredly
A common partnership in grief like this!"

Whereat they closed about her; but "Let be!
Leave, let me lie now! Strength forsakes my feet.
Hades is here, and shadowy on my eyes
Comes the night creeping. Children—children, now
Indeed, a mother is no more for you!
Farewell, O children, long enjoy the light!"

"Ah me, the melancholy word I hear,
Oppressive beyond every kind of death!
No, by the Deities, take heart nor dare
To give me up—no, by our children too

Made orphans of! But rise, be resolute,
Since, thou departed, I no more remain!
For in thee are we bound up, to exist
Or cease to be—so we adore thy love!"

—Which brought out truth to judgment. At this word
And protestation, all the truth in her
Claimed to assert itself: she waved away
The blue-eyed black-wing'd phantom, held in check
The advancing pageantry of Hades there,
And, with no change in her own countenance,
She fixed her eyes on the protesting man,
And let her lips unlock their sentence,—so!

"Admetos,—how things go with me thou seest,—
I wish to tell thee, ere I die, what things
I will should follow. I—to honour thee,
Secure for thee, by my own soul's exchange,
Continued looking on the daylight here—
Die for thee—yet, if so I pleased, might live,
Nay, wed what man of Thessaly I would,
And dwell i' the dome with pomp and queenliness.
I would not,—would not live bereft of thee,
With children orphaned, neither shrank at all,
Though having gifts of youth wherein I joyed.
Yet, who begot thee and who gave thee birth,

Both of these gave thee up; no less, a term
Of life was reached when death became them well,
Ay, well—to save their child and glorious die:
Since thou wast all they had, nor hope remained
Of having other children in thy place.
So, I and thou had lived out our full time,
Nor thou, left lonely of thy wife, wouldst groan
With children reared in orphanage: but thus
Some God disposed things, willed they so should be.
Be they so! Now do thou remember this,
Do me in turn a favour—favour, since
Certainly I shall never claim my due,
For nothing is more precious than a life:
But a fit favour, as thyself wilt say,
Loving our children here no less than I,
If head and heart be sound in thee at least.
Uphold them, make them masters of my house,
Nor wed and give a step-dame to the pair,
Who, being a worse wife than I, thro' spite
Will raise her hand against both thine and mine.
Never do this at least, I pray to thee!
For hostile the new-comer, the step-dame,
To the old brood—a very viper she
For gentleness! Here stand they, boy and girl;
The boy has got a father, a defence
Tower-like, he speaks to and has answer from:

But thou, my girl, how will thy virginhood
Conclude itself in marriage fittingly?
Upon what sort of sire-found yoke-fellow
Art thou to chance? with all to apprehend—
Lest, casting on thee some unkind report,
She blast thy nuptials in the bloom of youth.
For neither shall thy mother watch thee wed,
Nor hearten thee in childbirth, standing by
Just when a mother's presence helps the most!
No, for I have to die: and this my ill
Comes to me, nor to-morrow, no, nor yet
The third day of the month, but now, even now,
I shall be reckoned among those no more.
Farewell, be happy! And to thee, indeed,
Husband, the boast remains permissible
Thou hadst a wife was worthy! and to you,
Children; as good a mother gave you birth."

"Have courage!" interposed the friends, "For him
I have no scruple to declare—all this
Will he perform, except he fail of sense."

"All this shall be—shall be!" Admetos sobbed:
"Fear not! And, since I had thee living, dead
Alone wilt thou be called my wife: no fear
That some Thessalian ever styles herself

Bride, hails this man for husband in thy place!
No woman, be she of such lofty line
Or such surpassing beauty otherwise!
Enough of children: gain from these I have,
Such only may the Gods grant! since in thee
Absolute is our loss, where all was gain.
And I shall bear for thee no year-long grief,
But grief that lasts while my own days last, love!
Love! For my hate is she who bore me, now:
And him I hate, my father: loving-ones
Truly, in word not deed! But thou didst pay
All dearest to thee down, and buy my life,
Saving me so! Is there not cause enough
That I who part with such companionship
In thee, should make my moan? I moan, and more:
For I will end the feastings—social flow
O' the wine friends flock for, garlands and the Muse
That graced my dwelling. Never now for me
To touch the lyre, to lift my soul in song
At summons of the Lydian flute; since thou
From out my life hast emptied all the joy!
And this thy body, in thy likeness wrought
By some wise hand of the artificers,
Shall lie disposed within my marriage-bed:
This I will fall on, this enfold about,
Call by thy name,—my dear wife in my arms

Even though I have not, I shall seem to have—
A cold delight, indeed, but all the same
So should I lighten of its weight my soul!
And, wandering my way in dreams perchance,
Thyself wilt bless me: for, come when they will,
Even by night our loves are sweet to see.
But were the tongue and tune of Orpheus mine,
So that to Koré crying, or her lord,
In hymns, from Hades I might rescue thee—
Down would I go, and neither Plouton's dog
Nor Charon, he whose oar sends souls across,
Should stay me till again I made thee stand
Living, within the light! But, failing this,
There, where thou art, await me when I die,
Make ready our abode, my house-mate still!
For in the self-same cedar, me with thee
Will I provide that these our friends shall place,
My side lay close by thy side! Never, corpse
Although I be, would I division bear
From thee, my faithful one of all the world!"

So he stood sobbing: nowise insincere,
But somehow child-like, like his children, like
Childishness the world over. What was new
In this announcement that his wife must die?
What particle of pain beyond the pact

He made, with eyes wide open, long ago—
Made and was, if not glad, content to make?
Now that the sorrow, he had called for, came,
He sorrowed to the height: none heard him say,
However, what would seem so pertinent,
"To keep this pact, I find surpass my power:
Rescind it, Moirai! Give me back her life,
And take the life I kept by base exchange!
Or, failing that, here stands your laughing-stock
Fooled by you, worthy just the fate o' the fool
Who makes a pother to escape the best
And gain the worst you wiser Powers allot!"
No, not one word of this: nor did his wife
Despite the sobbing, and the silence soon
To follow, judge so much was in his thought—
Fancy that, should the Moirai acquiesce,
He would relinquish life nor let her die.
The man was like some merchant who, in storm,
Throws the freight over to redeem the ship:
No question, saving both were better still.
As it was,—why, he sorrowed, which sufficed.
So, all she seemed to notice in his speech
Was what concerned her children. Children, too,
Bear the grief and accept the sacrifice.
Rightly rules nature: does the blossomed bough
O' the grape-vine, or the dry grape's self, bleed wine?

So, bending to her children all her love,
She fastened on their father's only word
To purpose now, and followed it with this.
"O children, now yourselves have heard these things—
Your father saying he will never wed
Another woman to be over you,
Nor yet dishonour me!"

"And now at least
I say it, and I will accomplish too!"

"Then, for such promise of accomplishment,
Take from my hand these children!"

"Thus I take—
Dear gift from the dear hand!"

"Do thou become
Mother, now, to these children in my place!"

"Great the necessity I should be so,
At least, to these bereaved of thee!"

"Child—child!
Just when I needed most to live, below
Am I departing from you both!"

"Ah me!
And what shall I do, then, left lonely thus?"

"Time will appease thee: who is dead is nought."

"Take me with thee—take, by the Gods below!"

"We are sufficient, we who die for thee."

"Oh, Powers, ye widow me of what a wife!"

"And truly the dimmed eye draws earthward now!"

"Wife, if thou leav'st me, I am lost indeed!"

"She once was—now is nothing, thou mayst say."

"Raise thy face nor forsake thy children thus!"

"Ah, willingly indeed I leave them not!
But—fare ye well, my children!"

"Look on them—
Look!"

"I am nothingness."

"What dost thou? Leav'st . . ."

"Farewell!"
And in the breath she passed away.
"Undone—me miserable!" moaned the king,
While friends released the long-suspended sigh
"Gone is she: no wife for Admetos more!"

Such was the signal: how the woe broke forth,
Why tell?—or how the children's tears ran fast
Bidding their father note the eyelids' stare
Hands' droop, each dreadful circumstance of death.

"Ay, she hears not, she sees not: I and you,
'T is plain, are stricken hard and have to bear!"
Was all Admetos answered; for, I judge,
He only now began to taste the truth:
The thing done lay revealed, which undone thing,
Rehearsed for fact by fancy, at the best,
Never can equal. He had used himself
This long while (as he muttered presently)
To practise with the terms, the blow involved
By the bargain, sharp to bear, but bearable
Because of plain advantage at the end.
Now that, in fact not fancy, the blow fell—
Needs must he busy him with the surprise.

"Alkestis—not to see her nor be seen,
Hear nor be heard of by her, any more
To-day, to-morrow, to the end of time—
Did I mean this should buy my life?" thought he.

So, friends came round him, took him by the hand,
Bade him remember our mortality,
Its due, its doom: how neither was he first,
Nor would be last, to thus deplore the loved.

"I understand" slow the words came at last.
"Nor of a sudden did the evil here
Fly on me: I have known it long ago,
Ay, and essayed myself in misery;
Nothing is new. You have to stay, you friends,
Because the next need is to carry forth
The corpse here: you must stay and do your part,
Chant proper pæan to the God below;
Drink-sacrifice he likes not. I decree
That all Thessalians over whom I rule
Hold grief in common with me; let them shear
Their locks, and be the peplos black they show!
And you who to the chariot yoke your steeds,
Or manage steeds one-frontleted,—I charge,
Clip from each neck with steel the mane away!
And through my city, nor of flute nor lyre

Be there a sound till twelve full moons succeed.
For I shall never bury any corpse
Dearer than this to me, nor better friend:
One worthy of all honour from me, since
Me she has died for, she and she alone."

With that, he sought the inmost of the house,
He and his dead, to get grave's garniture,
While the friends sang the pæan that should peal.
"Daughter of Pelias, with farewell from me,
I' the house of Hades have thy unsunned home!
Let Hades know, the dark-haired deity,—
And he who sits to row and steer alike,
Old corpse-conductor, let him know he bears
Over the Acherontian lake, this time,
I' the two-oared boat, the best—oh, best by far
Of womankind! For thee, Alkestis Queen!
Many a time those haunters of the Muse
Shall sing thee to the seven-stringed mountain shell,
And glorify in hymns that need no harp,
At Sparta when the cycle comes about,
And that Karneian month wherein the moon
Rises and never sets the whole night through:
So too at splendid and magnificent
Athenai. Such the spread of thy renown,
And such the lay that, dying, thou hast left

Singer and sayer. O that I availed
Of my own might to send thee once again
From Hades' hall, Kokutos' stream, by help
O' the oar that dips the river, back to day!"

So, the song sank to prattle in her praise:
"Light, from above thee, lady, fall the earth,
Thou only one of womankind to die,
Wife for her husband! If Admetos take
Anything to him like a second spouse—
Hate from his offspring and from us shall be
His portion, let the king assure himself!
No mind his mother had to hide in earth
Her body for her son's sake, nor his sire
Had heart to save whom he begot,—not they,
The white-haired wretches! only thou it was,
I' the bloom of youth, didst save him and so die!
Might it be mine to chance on such a mate
And partner! For there 's penury in life
Of such allowance: were she mine at least,
So wonderful a wife, assuredly
She would companion me throughout my days
And never once bring sorrow!"

A great voice—

"My hosts here!"

Oh, the thrill that ran through us!

Never was aught so good and opportune
As that great interrupting voice! For see!
Here maundered this dispirited old age
Before the palace; whence a something crept
Which told us well enough without a word
What was a-doing inside,—every touch
O' the garland on those temples, tenderest
Disposure of each arm along its side,
Came putting out what warmth i' the world was left.
Then, as it happens at a sacrifice
When, drop by drop, some lustral bath is brimmed:
Into the thin and clear and cold, at once
They slaughter a whole wine-skin: Bacchos' blood
Sets the white water all a-flame; even so,
Sudden into the midst of sorrow, leapt
Along with the gay cheer of that great voice,
Hope, joy, salvation: Herakles was here!
Himself, o' the threshold, sent his voice on first
To herald all that human and divine
I' the weary happy face of him,—half God,
Half man, which made the god-part God the more.

"Hosts mine," he broke upon the sorrow with,
"Inhabitants of this Pheraian soil,
Chance I upon Admetos inside here?"

The irresistible sound wholesome heart
O' the hero,—more than all the mightiness
At labour in the limbs that, for man's sake,
Laboured and meant to labour their life long,—
This drove back, dried up sorrow at its source.
How could it brave the happy weary laugh
Of who had bantered sorrow "Sorrow here?
What have you done to keep your friend from harm?
Could no one give the life I see he keeps?
Or, say there 's sorrow here past friendly help,
Why waste a word or let a tear escape
While other sorrows wait you in the world,
And want the life of you, though helpless here?"
Clearly there was no telling such an one
How, when their monarch tried who loved him more
Than he loved them, and found they loved, as he,
Each man, himself, and held, no otherwise,
That, of all evils in the world, the worst
Was—being forced to die, whate'er death gain:
How all this selfishness in him and them
Caused certain sorrow which they sang about,—
I think that Herakles, who held his life
Out on his hand, for any man to take—
I think his laugh had marred their threnody.

"He is in the house" they answered. After all,

They might have told the story, talked their best
About the inevitable sorrow here,
Nor changed nor checked the kindly nature,—no!
So long as men were merely weak, not bad,
He loved men: were they Gods he used to help?
"Yea, Pheres' son is in-doors, Herakles.
But say, what sends thee to Thessalian soil,
Brought by what business to this Pherai town?"

"A certain labour that I have to do
Eurustheus the Tirunthian," laughed the God.

"And whither wendest—on what wandering
Bound now?" (they had an instinct, guessed what meant
Wanderings, labours, in the God's light mouth.)

"After the Thrakian Diomedes' car
With the four horses."

"Ah, but canst thou that?
Art inexperienced in thy host to be?"

"All-inexperienced: I have never gone
As yet to the land o' the Bistones."

"Then, look

By no means to be master of the steeds
Without a battle!"
"Battle there may be:
I must refuse no labour, all the same."

"Certainly, either having slain a foe
Wilt thou return to us, or, slain thyself,
Stay there!"
"And, even if the game be so,
The risk in it were not the first I run."

"But, say thou overpower the lord o' the place,
What more advantage dost expect thereby?"

"I shall drive off his horses to the king."

"No easy handling them to bit the jaw!"

"Easy enough; except, at least, they breathe
Fire from their nostrils!"
"But they mince up men
With those quick jaws!"
"You talk of provender
For mountain-beasts, and not mere horses' food!"

"Thou mayst behold their mangers caked with gore!"

"And of what sire does he who bred them boast
Himself the son?"
"Of Ares, king o' the targe—
Thrakian, of gold throughout."
Another laugh.
"Why, just the labour, just the lot for me
Dost thou describe in what I recognize!
Since hard and harder, high and higher yet,
Truly this lot of mine is like to go
If I must needs join battle with the brood
Of Ares: ay, I fought Lukaon first,
And again, Kuknos: now engage in strife
This third time, with such horses and such lord.
But there is nobody shall ever see
Alkmené's son shrink foemen's hand before!"

—"Or ever hear him say" (the Chorus thought)
"That death is terrible; and help us so
To chime in—'terrible beyond a doubt,
And, if to thee, why, to ourselves much more:
Know what has happened, then, and sympathise'!"
Therefore they gladly stopped the dialogue,
Shifted the burthen to new shoulder straight,
As, "Look where comes the lord o' the land, himself,
Admetos, from the palace!" they outbroke
In some surprise, as well as much relief.

What had induced the king to waive his right
And luxury of woe in loneliness?

Out he came quietly; the hair was clipt,
And the garb sable; else no outward sign
Of sorrow as he came and faced his friend.
Was truth fast terrifying tears away?
"Hail, child of Zeus, and sprung from Perseus too!"
The salutation ran without a fault.

"And thou, Admetos, King of Thessaly!"

"Would, as thou wishest me, the grace might fall!
But my good-wisher, that thou art, I know."

"What 's here? these shorn locks, this sad show of thee?"

"I must inter a certain corpse to-day."

"Now, from thy children God avert mischance!"

"They live, my children; all are in the house!"

"Thy father—if 't is he departs indeed,
His age was ripe at least."

"My father lives,
And she who bore me lives too, Herakles."

"It cannot be thy wife Alkestis gone?"

"Two-fold the tale is, I can tell of her."

"Dead dost thou speak of her, or living yet?"

"She is—and is not: hence the pain to me!"

"I learn no whit the more, so dark thy speech!"

"Know'st thou not on what fate she needs must fall?"

"I know she is resigned to die for thee."

"How lives she still, then, if submitting so?"

"Eh, weep her not beforehand! wait till then!"

"Who is to die is dead; doing is done."

"To be and not to be are thought diverse."

"Thou judgest this—I, that way, Herakles!"

"Well, but declare what causes thy complaint!
Who is the man has died from out thy friends?"

"No man: I had a woman in my mind."

"Alien, or someone born akin to thee?"

"Alien: but still related to my house."

"How did it happen then that here she died?"

"Her father dying left his orphan here."

"Alas, Admetos—would we found thee gay,
Not grieving!"

"What as if about to do
Subjoinest thou that comment?"

"I shall seek
Another hearth, proceed to other hosts."

"Never, O king, shall that be! No such ill
Betide me!"

"Nay, to mourners should there come
A guest, he proves importunate!"
"The dead—
Dead are they: but go thou within my house!"

"'T is base carousing beside friends who mourn."

"The guest-rooms, whither we shall lead thee, lie
Apart from ours."
"Nay, let me go my way!
Ten thousandfold the favour I shall thank!"

"It may not be thou goest to the hearth
Of any man but me!" so made an end
Admetos, softly and decisively,
Of the altercation. Herakles forbore:
And the king bade a servant lead the way,
Open the guest-rooms ranged remote from view
O' the main hall; tell the functionaries, next,
They had to furnish forth a plenteous feast,
And then shut close the doors o' the hall, midway,
"Because it is not proper friends who feast
Should hear a groaning or be grieved," quoth he.

Whereat the hero, who was truth itself,
Let out the smile again, repressed awhile

Like fountain-brilliance one forbids to play.
He did too many grandnesses, to note
Much in the meaner things about his path:
And stepping there, with face towards the sun,
Stopped seldom to pluck weeds or ask their names.
Therefore he took Admetos at the word:
This trouble must not hinder any more
A true heart from good will and pleasant ways.
And so, the great arm, which had slain the snake,
Strained his friend's head a moment in embrace
On that broad breast beneath the lion's hide,
Till the king's cheek winced at the thick rough gold;
And then strode off, with who had care of him,
To the remote guest-chamber: glad to give
Poor flesh and blood their respite and relief
In the interval 'twixt fight and fight again—
All for the world's sake. Our eyes followed him,
Be sure, till those mid-doors shut us outside.
The king, too, watched great Herakles go off
All faith, love, and obedience to a friend.

And when they questioned him, the simple ones,
"What dost thou? Such calamity to face,
Lies full before thee—and thou art so bold
As play the host, Admetos? Hast thy wits?"
He replied calmly to each chiding tongue:

"But if from house and home I forced away
A coming guest, wouldst thou have praised me more?
No, truly! since calamity were mine,
Nowise diminished; while I showed myself
Unhappy and inhospitable too:
So adding to my ills this other ill,
That mine were styled a stranger-hating house.
Myself have ever found this man the best
Of entertainers when I went his way
To parched and thirsty Argos."
"If so be—
Why didst thou hide what destiny was here,
When one came that was kindly, as thou say'st?"

"He never would have willed to cross my door
Had he known aught of my calamities.
And probably to some of you I seem
Unwise enough in doing what I do;
Such will scarce praise me: but these halls of mine
Know not to drive off and dishonour guests."

And so, the duty done, he turned once more
To go and busy him about his dead.
As for the sympathisers left to muse,
There was a change, a new light thrown on things,
Contagion from the magnanimity

O' the man whose life lay on his hand so light,
As up he stepped, pursuing duty still
"Higher and harder," as he laughed and said.
Somehow they found no folly now in the act
They blamed erewhile: Admetos' private grief
Shrank to a somewhat pettier obstacle
I' the way o' the world: they saw good days had bee
And good days, peradventure, still might be,
Now that they overlooked the present cloud
Heavy upon the palace opposite.
And soon the thought took words and music thus.

"Harbour of many a stranger, free to friend,
Ever and always, O thou house o' the man
We mourn for! Thee, Apollon's very self,
The lyric Puthian, deigned inhabit once,
Become a shepherd here in thy domains,
And pipe, adown the winding hill-side paths,
Pastoral marriage-poems to thy flocks
At feed: while with them fed in fellowship,
Through joy i' the music, spot-skin lynxes; ay,
And lions too, the bloody company,
Came, leaving Othrus' dell; and round thy lyre,
Phoibos, there danced the speckle-coated fawn,
Pacing on lightsome fetlock past the pines
Tress-topped, the creature's natural boundary,

Into the open everywhere; such heart
Had she within her, beating joyous beats,
At the sweet reassurance of thy song!
Therefore the lot o' the master is, to live
In a home multitudinous with herds,
Along by the fair-flowing Boibian lake,
Limited, that ploughed land and pasture-plain,
Only where stand the sun's steeds, stabled west
I' the cloud, by that mid-air which makes the clime
Of those Molossoi: and he rules as well
O'er the Aigaian, up to Pelion's shore,—
Sea-stretch without a port! Such lord have we:
And here he opens house now, as of old,
Takes to the heart of it a guest again:
Though moist the eyelid of the master, still
Mourning his dear wife's body, dead but now!"

And they admired: nobility of soul
Was self-impelled to reverence, they saw:
The best men ever prove the wisest too:
Something instinctive guides them still aright.
And on each soul this boldness settled now,
That one, who reverenced he Gods so much,
Would prosper yet: (or—I could wish it ran—
Who venerates the Gods, i' the main will still
Practise things honest though obscure to judge).

They ended, for Admetos entered now;
Having disposed all duteously indoors,
He came into the outside world again,
Quiet as ever: but a quietude
Bent on pursuing its descent to truth,
As who must grope until he gain the ground
O' the dungeon doomed to be his dwelling now.
Already high o'er head was piled the dusk,
When something pushed to stay his downward step,
Pluck back despair just reaching its repose.
He would have bidden the kind presence there
Observe that,—since the corpse was coming out,
Cared for in all things that befit the case,
Carried aloft, in decency and state,
To the last burial place and burning pile,—
'T were proper friends addressed, as custom prompts,
Alkestis bound on her last journeying.

"Ay, for we see thy father" they subjoined
"Advancing as the aged foot best may;
His servants, too: each bringing in his hand
Adornments for thy wife, all pomp that 's due
To the downward-dwelling people." And in truth,
By slow procession till they filled the stage,
Came Pheres, and his following, and their gifts.
You see, the worst of the interruption was,

It plucked back, with an over-hasty hand,
Admetos from descending to the truth,
(I told you)—put him on the brink again,
Full i' the noise and glare where late he stood:
With no fate fallen and irrevocable,
But all things subject still to chance and change:
And that chance—life, and that change—happiness.
And with the low strife came the little mind:
He was once more the man might gain so much,
Life too and wife too, would his friends but help!
All he felt now was that there faced him one
Supposed the likeliest, in emergency,
To help: and help, by mere self-sacrifice
So natural, it seemed as if the sire
Must needs lie open still to argument,
Withdraw the rash decision, not to die
But rather live, though death would save his son:—
Argument like the ignominious grasp
O' the drowner whom his fellow grasps as fierce,
Each marvelling that the other needs must hold
Head out of water, though friend choke thereby.

And first the father's salutation fell.
Burthened, he came, in common with his child,
Who lost, none would gainsay, a good chaste spouse:
Yet such things must be borne, though hard to bear.

"So, take this tribute of adornment, deep
In the earth let it descend along with her!
Behoves we treat the body with respect
—Of one who died, at least, to save thy life,
Kept me from being childless, nor allowed
That I, bereft of thee, should peak and pine
In melancholy age! she, for the sex,
All of her sisters, put in evidence,
By daring such a feat, that female life
Might prove more excellent than men suppose.
O thou Alkestis!" out he burst in fine,
"Who, while thou savedst this my son, didst raise
Also myself from sinking,—hail to thee!
Well be it with thee even in the house
Of Hades! I maintain, if mortals must
Marry, this sort of marriage is the sole
Permitted those among them who are wise!"

So his oration ended. Like hates like:
Accordingly Admetos,—full i' the face
Of Pheres, his true father, outward shape
And inward fashion, body matching soul,—
Saw just himself when years should do their work
And reinforce the selfishness inside
Until it pushed the last disguise away:
As when the liquid metal cools i' the mould,

Stands forth a statue: bloodless, hard, cold bronze.
So, in old Pheres, young Admetos showed,
Pushed to completion: and a shudder ran,
And his repugnance soon had vent in speech:
Glad to escape outside, nor, pent within,
Find itself there fit food for exercise.

"Neither to this interment called by me
Comest thou, nor thy presence I account
Among the covetable proofs of love.
As for thy tribute of adornment,—no!
Ne'er shall she don it, ne'er in debt to thee
Be buried! What is thine, that keep thou still!
Then it behoved thee to commiserate
When I was perishing: but thou—who stood'st
Foot-free o' the snare, wast acquiescent then
That I, the young, should die, not thou, the old—
Wilt thou lament this corpse thyself hast slain?
Thou wast not, then, true father to this flesh;
Nor she, who makes profession of my birth
And styles herself my mother, neither she
Bore me: but, come of slave's blood, I was cast
Stealthily 'neath the bosom of thy wife!
Thou showedst, put to touch, the thing thou art,
Nor I esteem myself born child of thee!
Otherwise, thine is the preëminence

O' er all the world in cowardice of soul :
Who, being the old man thou art, arrived
Where life should end, didst neither will nor dare
Die for thy son, but left the task to her,
The alien woman, whom I well might think
Own, only mother both and father too !
And yet a fair strife had been thine to strive,
—Dying for thy own child ; and brief for thee
In any case, the rest of time to live ;
While I had lived, and she, our rest of time,
Nor I been left to groan in solitude.
Yet certainly all things which happy man
Ought to experience, thy experience grasped.
Thou wast a ruler through the bloom of youth,
And I was son to thee, recipient due
Of sceptre and demesne,—no need to fear
That dying thou shouldst leave an orphan house
For strangers to despoil. Nor yet wilt thou
Allege that as dishonouring, forsooth,
Thy length of days, I gave thee up to die,—
I, who have held thee in such reverence !
And in exchange for it, such gratitude
Thou, father,—thou award'st me, mother mine !
Go, lose no time, then, in begetting sons
Shall cherish thee in age, and, when thou diest,
Deck up and lay thee out as corpses claim !

For never I, at least, with this my hand
Will bury thee: it is myself am dead
So far as lies in thee. But if I light
Upon another saviour, and still see
The sunbeam,—his, the child I call myself,
His, the old age that claims my cherishing.
How vainly do these aged pray for death,
Abuse the slow drag of senility!
But should death step up, nobody inclines
To die, nor age is now the weight it was!"

You see what all this poor pretentious talk
Tried at,—how weakness strove to hide itself
In bluster against weakness,—the loud word
To hide the little whisper, not so low
Already in that heart beneath those lips!
Ha, could it be, who hated cowardice
Stood confessed craven, and who lauded so
Self-immolating love, himself had pushed
The loved one to the altar in his place?
Friends interposed, would fain stop further play
O' the sharp-edged tongue: they felt love's champion here
Had left an undefended point or two,
The antagonist might profit by; bade "Pause!
Enough the present sorrow! Nor, O son,

Whet thus against thyself thy father's soul!"

Ay, but old Pheres was the stouter stuff!
Admetos, at the flintiest of the heart,
Had so much soft in him as held a fire:
The other was all iron, clashed from flint
Its fire, but shed no spark and showed no bruise.
Did Pheres crave instruction as to facts?
He came, content, the ignoble word, for him,
Should lurk still in the blackness of each breast,
As sleeps the water-serpent half surmised:
Not brought up to the surface at a bound,
By one touch of the idly-probing spear,
Reed-like against unconquerable scale.
He came pacific, rather, as strength should,
Bringing the decent praise, the due regret,
And each banality prescribed of old.
Did he commence "Why let her die for you?"
And rouse the coiled and quiet ugliness
"What is so good to man as man's own life?"
No: but the other did: and, for his pains,
Out, full in face of him, the venom leapt.

"And whom dost thou make bold, son—Ludian
slave,
Or Phrugian whether, money made thy ware,

To drive at with revilings? Know'st thou not
I, a Thessalian, from Thessalian sire
Spring and am born legitimately free?
Too arrogant art thou; and, youngster words
Casting against me, having had thy fling,
Thou goest not off as all were ended so!
I gave thee birth indeed and mastership
I' the mansion, brought thee up to boot: there ends
My owing, nor extends to die for thee!
Never did I receive it as a law
Hereditary, no, nor Greek at all,
That sires in place of sons were bound to die.
For, to thy sole and single self wast thou
Born, with whatever fortune, good or bad;
Such things as bear bestowment, those thou hast;
Already ruling widely, broad-lands, too,
Doubt not but I shall leave thee in due time:
For why? My father left me them before.
Well then, where wrong I thee?—of what defraud?
Neither do thou die for this man, myself,
Nor let him die for thee!—is all I beg.
Thou joyest seeing daylight: dost suppose
Thy father joys not too? Undoubtedly,
Long I account the time to pass below,
And brief my span of days; yet sweet the same:
Is it otherwise to thee who, impudent,

Didst fight off this same death, and livest now
Through having sneaked past fate apportioned thee,
And slain thy wife so? Cryest cowardice
On me, I wonder, thou—whom, poor poltroon,
A very woman worsted, daring death
Just for the sake of thee, her handsome spark?
Shrewdly hast thou contrived how not to die
For evermore now: 't is but still persuade
The wife, for the time being, to take thy place!
What, and thy friends who would not do the like,
These dost thou carp at, craven thus thyself?
Crouch and be silent, craven! Comprehend
That, if thou lovest so that life of thine,
Why, everybody loves his own life too:
So, good words, henceforth! If thou speak us ill,
Many and true an ill thing shalt thou hear!"

There you saw leap the hydra at full length!
Only, the old kept glorying the more,
The more the portent thus uncoiled itself,
Whereas the young man shuddered head to foot,
And shrank from kinship with the creature. Why
Such horror, unless what he hated most,
Vaunting itself outside, might fairly claim
Acquaintance with the counterpart at home?
I would the Chorus here had plucked up heart,

Spoken out boldly and explained the man,
If not to men, to Gods. That way, I think,
Sophokles would have led their dance and song.
Here, they said simply "Too much evil spoke
On both sides!" As the young before, so now
They bade the old man leave abusing thus.

"Let him speak,—I have spoken!" said the youth:
And so died out the wrangle by degrees
In wretched bickering. "If thou wince at fact,
Behoved thee not prove faulty to myself!"

"Had I died for thee I had faulted more!"

"All 's one, then, for youth's bloom and age to die?"

"Our duty is to live one life, not two!"

"Go then, and outlive Zeus, for aught I care!"

"What, curse thy parents with no sort of cause?"

"Curse, truly! All thou lovest is long life!"

"And dost not thou, too, all for love of life,
Carry out now, in place of thine, this corpse?"

" Monument, rather, of thy cowardice,
Thou worst one ! "
" Not for me she died, I hope !
That, thou wilt hardly say ! "
" No, simply this :
Would, some day, thou mayst come to need myself ! "

" Meanwhile, woo many wives—the more will die ! "

" And so shame thee who never dared the like ! "

" Dear is this light o' the sun-god—dear, I say ! "

" Proper conclusion for a beast to draw ! "

" One thing is certain : there 's no laughing now,
As out thou bearest the poor dead old man ! "

" Die when thou wilt, thou wilt die infamous ! "

" And once dead, whether famed or infamous,
I shall not care ! "
" Alas and yet again !
How full is age of impudency ! "
" True !
Thou couldst not call thy young wife impudent :

She was found foolish merely."

"Get thee gone!
And let me bury this my dead!"

"I go.
Thou buriest her whom thou didst murder first;
Whereof there 's some account to render yet
Those kinsfolk by the marriage-side! I think,
Brother Akastos may be classed with me,
Among the beasts, not men, if he omit
Avenging upon thee his sister's blood!"

"Go to perdition, with thy housemate too!
Grow old all childlessly, with child alive,
Just as ye merit! for to me, at least,
Beneath the same roof ne'er do ye return.
And did I need by heralds' help renounce
The ancestral hearth, I had renounced the same!
But we—since this woe, lying at our feet
I' the path, is to be borne—let us proceed
And lay the body on the pyre."

I think,
What, thro' this wretched wrangle, kept the man
From seeing clear—beside the cause I gave—
Was, that the woe, himself described as full
I' the path before him, there did really lie—
Not roll into the abyss of dead and gone.

How, with Alkestis present, calmly crowned,
Was she so irrecoverable yet—
The bird, escaped, that 's just on bough above,
The flower, let flutter half-way down the brink?
Not so detached seemed lifelessness from life
But—one dear stretch beyond all straining yet—
And he might have her at his heart once more,
When, in the critical minute, up there comes
The father and the fact, to trifle time!

"To the pyre!" an instinct prompted: pallid face,
And passive arm and pointed foot, when these
No longer shall absorb the sight, O friends,
Admetos will begin to see indeed
Who the true foe was, where the blows should fall!

So, the old selfish Pheres went his way,
Case-hardened as he came; and left the youth,
(Only half-selfish now, since sensitive)
To go on learning by a light the more,
As friends moved off, renewing dirge the while:

"Unhappy in thy daring! Noble dame,
Best of the good, farewell! With favouring face
May Hermes the infernal, Hades too,
Receive thee! And if there,—ay, there,—some touch

Of further dignity await the good,
Sharing with them, mayst thou sit throned by her
The Bride of Hades, in companionship!"

Wherewith, the sad procession wound away,
Made slowly for the suburb sepulchre.
And lo,—while still one's heart, in time and tune,
Paced after that symmetric step of Death
Mute-marching, to the mind's eye, at the head
O' the mourners—one hand pointing out their path
With the long pale terrific sword we saw,
The other leading, with grim tender grace,
Alkestis quieted and consecrate,—
Lo, life again knocked laughing at the door!
The world goes on, goes ever, in and through,
And out again o' the cloud. We faced about,
Fronted the palace where the mid-hall-gate
Opened—not half, nor half of half, perhaps—
Yet wide enough to let out light and life,
And warmth and bounty and hope and joy, at once.
Festivity burst wide, fruit rare and ripe
Crushed in the mouth of Bacchos, pulpy-prime,
All juice and flavour, save one single seed
Duly ejected from the God's nice lip,
Which lay o' the red edge, blackly visible—
To wit, a certain ancient servitor:

On whom the festal jaws o' the palace shut,
So, there he stood, a much-bewildered man.
Stupid? Nay, but sagacious in a sort:
Learned, life long, i' the first outside of things,
Though bat for blindness to what lies beneath
And needs a nail-scratch ere 't is laid you bare.
This functionary was the trusted one
We saw deputed by Admetos late
To lead in Herakles and help him, soul
And body, to such snatched repose, snapped-up
Sustainment, as might do away the dust
O' the last encounter, knit each nerve anew
For that next onset sure to come at cry
O' the creature next assailed,—nay, should it prove
Only the creature that came forward now
To play the critic upon Herakles!

"Many the guests"—so he soliloquized
In musings burdensome to breast before,
When it seemed not too prudent tongue should wag—
"Many, and from all quarters of this world,
The guests I now have known frequent our house,
For whom I spread the banquet; but than this,
Never a worse one did I yet receive
At the hearth here! One who seeing, first of all,
The master's sorrow, entered gate the same,

And had the hardihood to house himself.
Did things stop there! But, modest by no means,
He took what entertainment lay to hand,
Knowing of our misfortune,—did we fail
In aught of the fit service, urged us serve
Just as a guest expects! And in his hands
Taking the ivied goblet, drinks and drinks
The unmixed product of black mother-earth,
Until the blaze o' the wine went round about
And warmed him: then he crowns with myrtle sprigs
His head, and howls discordance—twofold lay
Was thereupon for us to listen to—
This fellow singing, namely, nor restrained
A jot by sympathy with sorrows here—
While we o' the household mourned our mistress—
mourned,
That is to say, in silence—never showed
The eyes, which we kept wetting, to the guest—
For there Admetos was imperative.
And so, here am I helping make at home
A guest, some fellow ripe for wickedness,
Robber or pirate, while she goes her way
Out of our house: and neither was it mine
To follow in procession, nor stretch forth
Hand, wave my lady dear a last farewell,
Lamenting who to me and all of us

Domestics was a mother: myriad harms
She used to ward away from everyone,
And mollify her husband's ireful mood.
I ask then, do I justly hate or no
This guest, this interloper on our grief?"

"Hate him and justly!" Here 's the proper judge
Of what is due to the house from Herakles!
This man of much experience saw the first
O' the feeble duckings-down at destiny,
When King Admetos went his rounds, poor soul,
A-begging somebody to be so brave
As die for one afraid to die himself—
"Thou, friend? Thou, love? Father or mother,
then!
None of you? What, Alkestis must Death catch?
O best of wives, one woman in the world!
But nowise droop: our prayers may still assist:
Let us try sacrifice; if those avail
Nothing and Gods avert their countenance,
Why, deep and durable our grief will be!"
Whereat the house, this worthy at its head,
Re-echoed "deep and durable our grief!"
This sage, who justly hated Herakles,
Did he suggest once "Rather I than she!"
Admonish the Turannos—"Be a man!

Bear thine own burden, never think to thrust
Thy fate upon another and thy wife!
It were a dubious gain could death be doomed
That other, and no passionatest plea
Of thine, to die instead, have force with fate;
Seeing thou lov'st Alkestis: what were life
Unlighted by the loved one? But to live—
Not merely live unsolaced by some thought,
Some word so poor—yet solace all the same—
As 'Thou i' the sepulchre, Alkestis, say!
Would I, or would not I, to save thy life,
Die, and die on, and die for evermore?'
No! but to read red-written up and down
The world 'This is the sunshine, this the shade,
This is some pleasure of earth, sky or sea,
Due to that other, dead that thou mayst live!'
Such were a covetable gain to thee?
Go die, fool, and be happy while 't is time!"
One word of counsel in this kind, methinks,
Had fallen to better purpose than Ai, ai,
Pheu, pheu, e, papai, and a pother of praise
O' the best, best, best one! Nothing was to hate
In King Admetos, Pheres, and the rest
O' the household down to his heroic self!
This was the one thing hateful: Herakles
Had flung into the presence, frank and free,

Out from the labour into the repose,
Ere out again and over head and ears
I' the heart of labour, all for love of men :
Making the most o' the minute, that the soul
And body, strained to height a minute since,
Might lie relaxed in joy, this breathing-space,
For man's sake more than ever ; till the bow,
Restrung o' the sudden, at first cry for help,
Should send some unimaginable shaft
True to the aim and shatteringly through
The plate-mail of a monster, save man so.
He slew the pest o' the marish yesterday :
To-morrow he would bit the flame-breathed stud
That fed on man's-flesh : and this day between—
Because he held it natural to die,
And fruitless to lament a thing past cure,
So, took his fill of food, wine, song and flowers,
Till the new labour claimed him soon enough,—
"Hate him and justly!"
True, Charopé mine!
The man surmised not Herakles lay hid
I' the guest ; or, knowing it, was ignorant
That still his lady lived—for Herakles ;
Or else judged lightness needs must indicate
This or the other caitiff quality :
And therefore—had been right if not so wrong!

For who expects the sort of him will scratch
A nail's depth, scrape the surface just to see
What peradventure underlies the same?

So, he stood petting up his puny hate,
Parent-wise, proud of the ill-favoured babe.
Not long! A great hand, careful lest it crush,
Startled him on the shoulder: up he stared,
And over him, who stood but Herakles!
There smiled the mighty presence, all one smile
And no touch more of the world-weary God,
Through the brief respite. Just a garland's grace
About the brow, a song to satisfy
Head, heart and breast, and trumpet-lips at once,
A solemn draught of true religious wine,
And,—how should I know?—half a mountain goat
Torn up and swallowed down,—the feast was fierce
But brief: all cares and pains took wing and flew,
Leaving the hero ready to begin
And help mankind, whatever woe came next,
Even though what came next should be nought more
Than the mean querulous mouth o' the man, remarked
Pursing its grievance up till patience failed
And the sage needs must rush out, as we saw
To sulk outside and pet his hate in peace.
By no means would the Helper have it so:

He who was just about to handle brutes
In Thrace, and bit the jaws which breathed the flame,—
Well, if a good laugh and a jovial word
Could bridle age which blew bad humours forth,
That were a kind of help, too !
"Thou, there!" hailed
This grand benevolence the ungracious one—
"Why look'st so solemn and so thought-absorbed?
To guests a servant should not sour-faced be,
But do the honours with a mind urbane.
While thou, contrariwise, beholding here
Arrive thy master's comrade, hast for him
A churlish visage, all one beetle-brow—
Having regard to grief that 's out-of-door!
Come hither, and so get to grow more wise!
Things mortal—know'st the nature that they have?
No, I imagine ! whence could knowledge spring?
Give ear to me, then! For all flesh to die,
Is nature's due; nor is there any one
Of mortals with assurance he shall last
The coming morrow: for, what 's born of chance
Invisibly proceeds the way it will,
Not to be learned, no fortune-teller's prize.
This, therefore, having heard and known through me,
Gladden thyself! Drink! Count the day-by-day
Existence thine, and all the other—chance!

Ay, and pay homage also to by far
The sweetest of divinities for man,
Kupris! Benignant Goddess will she prove!
But as for aught else, leave and let things be!
And trust my counsel, if I seem to speak
To purpose—as I do, apparently.
Wilt not thou, then,—discarding overmuch
Mournfulness, do away with this shut door,
Come drink along with me, be-garlanded
This fashion? Do so, and—I well know what—
From this stern mood, this shrunk-up state of mind,
The pit-pat fall o' the flagon-juice down throat
Soon will dislodge thee from bad harbourage!
Men being mortal should think mortal-like:
Since to your solemn, brow-contracting sort,
All of them,—so I lay down law at least,—
Life is not truly life but misery."

Whereto the man with softened surliness:
"We know as much: but deal with matters, now,
Hardly befitting mirth and revelry."

"No intimate, this woman that is dead:
Mourn not too much! For, those o' the house itself,
Thy masters live, remember!"

"Live indeed?
Ah, thou know'st nought o' the woe within these
walls!"

"I do—unless thy master spoke me false
Somehow!"
"Ay, ay, too much he loves a guest,
Too much, that master mine!" so muttered he.

"Was it improper he should treat me well,
Because an alien corpse was in the way?"

"No alien, but most intimate indeed!"

"Can it be, some woe was, he told me not?"

"Farewell and go thy way! Thy cares for thee—
To us, our master's sorrow is a care."

"This word begins no tale of alien woe!"

"Had it been other woe than intimate,
I could have seen thee feast, nor felt amiss."

"What! have I suffered strangely from my host?"

"Thou cam'st not at a fit reception-time:
With sorrow here beforehand: and thou seest
Shorn hair, black robes."
"But who is it that 's dead?
Some child gone? or the aged sire perhaps?"

"Admetos' wife, then! she has perished, guest!"

"How sayest? And did ye house me, all the same?"

"Ay: for he had thee in that reverence
He dared not turn thee from his door away!"

"O hapless, and bereft of what a mate!"

"All of us now are dead, not she alone!"

"But I divined it! seeing, as I did,
His eye that ran with tears, his close-clipt hair,
His countenance! Though he persuaded me,
Saying it was a stranger's funeral
He went with to the grave: against my wish,
He forced on me that I should enter doors,
Drink in the hall o' the hospitable man
Circumstanced so! And do I revel yet
With wreath on head? But—thou to hold thy peace

Nor tell me what a woe oppressed my friend!
Where is he gone to bury her? Where am I
To go and find her?"
"By the road that leads
Straight to Larissa, thou wilt see the tomb,
Out of the suburb, a carved sepulchre."

So said he, and therewith dismissed himself
Inside to his lamenting: somewhat soothed,
However, that he had adroitly spoilt
The mirth of the great creature: oh, he marked
The movement of the mouth, how lip pressed lip,
And either eye forgot to shine, as, fast,
He plucked the chaplet from his forehead, dashed
The myrtle-sprays down, trod them underfoot!
And all the joy and wonder of the wine
Withered away, like fire from off a brand
The wind blows over—beacon though it be,
Whose merry ardour only meant to make
Somebody all the better for its blaze,
And save lost people in the dark: quenched now!

Not long quenched! As the flame, just hurried off
The brand's edge, suddenly renews its bite,
Tasting some richness caked i' the core o' the tree,—
Pine, with a blood that 's oil,—and triumphs up

Pillar-wise to the sky and saves the world :
So, in a spasm and splendour of resolve,
All at once did the God surmount the man.

" O much-enduring heart and hand of mine !
Now show what sort of son she bore to Zeus,
That daughter of Elektruon, Tiruns' child,
Alkmené ! for that son must needs save now
The just-dead lady : ay, establish here
I' the house again Alkestis, bring about
Comfort and succour to Admetos so !
I will go lie in wait for Death, black-stoled
King of the corpses ! I shall find him, sure,
Drinking, beside the tomb, o' the sacrifice :
And if I lie in ambuscade, and leap
Out of my lair, and seize—encircle him
Till one hand join the other round about—
There lives not who shall pull him out from me,
Rib-mauled, before he let the woman go !
But even say I miss the booty,—say,
Death comes not to the boltered blood,—why then,
Down go I, to the unsunned dwelling-place
Of Koré and the king there,—make demand,
Confident I shall bring Alkestis back,
So as to put her in the hands of him
My host, that housed me, never drove me off :

Though stricken with sore sorrow, hid the stroke,
Being a noble heart and honouring me!
Who of Thessalians, more than this man, loves
The stranger? Who, that now inhabits Greece?
Wherefore he shall not say the man was vile
Whom he befriended,—native noble heart!"

So, one look upward, as if Zeus might laugh
Approval of his human progeny,—
One summons of the whole magnific frame,
Each sinew to its service,—up he caught,
And over shoulder cast, the lion-shag,
Let the club go,—for had he not those hands?
And so went striding off, on that straight way
Leads to Larissa and the suburb tomb.
Gladness be with thee, Helper of our world!
I think this is the authentic sign and seal
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
And recommence at sorrow: drops like seed
After the blossom, ultimate of all.
Say, does the seed scorn earth and seek the sun?
Surely it has no other end and aim
Than to drop, once more die into the ground,
Taste cold and darkness and oblivion there:

And thence rise, tree-like grow through pain to joy,
More joy and most joy,—do man good again.

So, to the struggle off strode Herakles.
When silence closed behind the lion-garb,
Back came our dull fact settling in its place,
Though heartiness and passion half-dispersed
The inevitable fate. And presently
In came the mourners from the funeral,
One after one, until we hoped the last
Would be Alkestis and so end our dream.
Could they have really left Alkestis lone
I' the wayside sepulchre! Home, all save she!
And when Admetos felt that it was so,
By the stand-still: when he lifted head and face
From the two hiding hands and peplos' fold,
And looked forth, knew the palace, knew the hills,
Knew the plains, knew the friendly frequence there,
And no Alkestis any more again,
Why, the whole woe billow-like broke on him.

"O hateful entry, hateful countenance
O' the widowed halls!"—he moaned. "What was to be?
Go there? Stay here? Speak, not speak? All was now
Mad and impossible alike; one way
And only one was sane and safe—to die:

Now he was made aware how dear is death,
How loveable the dead are, how the heart
Yearns in us to go hide where they repose,
When we find sunbeams do no good to see,
Nor earth rests rightly where our footsteps fall.
His wife had been to him the very pledge,
Sun should be sun, earth—earth; the pledge was robbed,
Pact broken, and the world was left no world."
He stared at the impossible mad life:
Stood, while they urged "Advance—advance! Go deep
Into the utter dark, thy palace-core!"
They tried what they called comfort, "touched the quick
Of the ulceration in his soul," he said,
With memories,—"once thy joy was thus and thus!"
True comfort were to let him fling himself
Into the hollow grave o' the tomb, and so
Let him lie dead along with all he loved.

One bade him note that his own family
Boasted a certain father whose sole son,
Worthy bewailment, died: and yet the sire
Bore stoutly up against the blow and lived;
For all that he was childless now, and prone
Already to grey hairs, far on in life.
Could such a good example miss effect?
Why fix foot, stand so, staring at the house,

Why not go in, as that wise kinsman would?

"O that arrangement of the house I know!
How can I enter, how inhabit thee
Now that one cast of fortune changes all?
Oh me, for much divides the then from now!
Then—with those pine-tree torches, Pelian pomp
And marriage-hymns, I entered, holding high
The hand of my dear wife; while many-voiced
The revelry that followed me and her
That 's dead now,—friends felicitating both,
As who were lofty-lineaged, each of us
Born of the best, two wedded and made one;
Now—wail is wedding-chant's antagonist,
And, for white peplos, stoles in sable state
Herald my way to the deserted couch!"

The one word more they ventured was "This grief
Befell thee witless of what sorrow means,
Close after prosperous fortune: but, reflect!
Thou hast saved soul and body. Dead, thy wife—
Living, the love she left. What 's novel here?
Many the man, from whom Death long ago
Loosed the life-partner!"
Then Admetos spoke:
Turned on the comfort, with no tears, this time.

He was beginning to be like his wife.
I told you of that pressure to the point,
Word slow pursuing word in monotone,
Alkestis spoke with; so Admetos, now,
Solemnly bore the burden of the truth.
And as the voice of him grew, gathered strength,
And groaned on, and persisted to the end,
We felt how deep had been descent in grief,
And with what change he came up now to light,
And left behind such littleness as tears.

"Friends, I account the fortune of my wife
Happier than mine, though it seem otherwise:
For, her indeed no grief will ever touch,
And she from many a labour pauses now,
Renowned one! Whereas I, who ought not live,
But do live, by evading destiny,
Sad life am I to lead, I learn at last!
For how shall I bear going in-doors here?
Accosting whom? By whom saluted back,
Shall I have joyous entry? Whither turn?
Inside, the solitude will drive me forth,
When I behold the empty bed—my wife's—
The seat she used to sit upon, the floor
Unsprinkled as when dwellers loved the cool,
The children that will clasp my knees about,

Cry for their mother back: these servants too
Moaning for what a guardian they have lost!
Inside my house such circumstance awaits.
Outside,—Thessalian people's marriage-feasts
And gatherings for talk will harass me,
With overflow of women everywhere;
It is impossible I look on them—
Familiars of my wife and just her age!
And then, whoever is a foe of mine,
And lights on me—why, this will be his word—
'See there! alive ignobly, there he skulks
That played the dastard when it came to die,
And, giving her he wedded, in exchange,
Kept himself out of Hades safe and sound,
The coward! Do you call that creature—man?
He hates his parents for declining death,
Just as if he himself would gladly die!'
This sort of reputation shall I have,
Beside the other ills enough in store.
Ill-famed, ill-faring,—what advantage, friends,
Do you perceive I gain by life for death?"

That was the truth. Vexed waters sank to smooth:
'T was only when the last of bubbles broke,
The latest circlet widened all away
And left a placid level, that up swam

To the surface the drowned truth, in dreadful change.
So, through the quiet and submission,—ay,
Spite of some strong words—(for you miss the tone)
The grief was getting to be infinite—
Grief, friends fell back before. Their office shrank
To that old solace of humanity—
"Being born mortal, bear grief! Why born else?"
And they could only meditate anew.

"They, too, upborne by airy help of song,
And haply science, which can find the stars,
Had searched the heights: had sounded depths as well
By catching much at books where logic lurked,
Yet nowhere found they aught could overcome
Necessity: not any medicine served,
Which Thrakian tablets treasure, Orphic voice
Wrote itself down upon: nor remedy
Which Phoibos gave to the Asklepiadai;
Cutting the roots of many a virtuous herb
To solace overburdened mortals. None!
Of this sole goddess, never may we go
To altar nor to image: sacrifice
She hears not. All to pray for is—'Approach!
But, oh, no harder on me, awful one,
Than heretofore! Let life endure thee still!

For, whatsoe'er Zeus' nod decree, that same
In concert with thee hath accomplishment.
Iron, the very stuff o' the Chaluboi,
Thou, by sheer strength, dost conquer and subdue;
Nor, of that harsh abrupt resolve of thine,
Any relenting is there!'

"O my king!
Thee also, in the shackles of those hands,
Not to be shunned, the Goddess grasped! Yet, bear!
Since never wilt thou lead from underground
The dead ones, wail thy worst! If mortals die,—
The very children of immortals, too,
Dropped mid our darkness, these decay as sure!
Dear indeed was she while among us: dear,
Now she is dead, must she for ever be:
Thy portion was to clasp, within thy couch,
The noblest of all women as a wife.
Nor be the tomb of her supposed some heap
That hides mortality: but like the Gods
Honoured, a veneration to a world
Of wanderers! Oft the wanderer, struck thereby,
Who else had sailed past in his merchant-ship,
Ay, he shall leave ship, land, long wind his way
Up to the mountain-summit, till there break
Speech forth 'So, this was she, then, died of old
To save her husband! now, a deity

She bends above us. Hail, benignant one!
Give good!' Such voices so will supplicate.

"But—can it be? Alkmené's offspring comes,
Admetos!—to thy house advances here!"

I doubt not, they supposed him decently
Dead somewhere in that winter world of Thrace—
Vanquished by one o' the Bistones, or else
Victim to some mad steed's voracity—
For did not friends prognosticate as much?
It were a new example to the point,
That "children of immortals, dropped by stealth
Into our darkness, die as sure as we!"
A case to quote and comfort people with:
But, as for lamentation, ai and pheu,
Right-minded subjects kept them for their lord.

Ay, he it was advancing! In he strode,
And took his stand before Admetos,—turned
Now by despair to such a quietude,
He neither raised his face nor spoke, this time,
The while his friend surveyed him steadily.
That friend looked rough with fighting: had he strained
Worst brute to breast was ever strangled yet?
Somehow, a victory—for there stood the strength,

Happy, as always; something grave, perhaps;
The great vein-cordage on the fret-worked front,
Black-swollen, beaded yet with battle-dew
The yellow hair o' the hero!—his big frame
A-quiver with each muscle sinking back
Into the sleepy smooth it leaped from late.
Under the great guard of one arm, there leant
A shrouded something, live and woman-like,
Propped by the heart-beats 'neath the lion-coat.
When he had finished his survey, it seemed,
The heavings of the heart began subside,
The helpful breath returned, and last the smile
Shone out, all Herakles was back again,
As the words followed the saluting hand.

"To friendly man, behoves we freely speak,
Admetos!—nor keep buried, deep in breast,
Blame we leave silent. I assuredly
Judged myself proper, if I should approach
By accident calamities of thine,
To be demonstrably thy friend: but thou
Told'st me not of the corpse then claiming care,
That was thy wife's, but didst instal me guest
I' the house here, as though busied with a grief
Indeed, but then, mere grief beyond thy gate:
And so, I crowned my head, and to the Gods

Poured my libations in thy dwelling-place,
With such misfortune round me. And I blame—
Certainly blame thee, having suffered thus!
But still I would not pain thee, pained enough:
So let it pass! Wherefore I seek thee now,
Having turned back again though onward bound,
That I will tell thee. Take and keep for me
This woman, till I come thy way again,
Driving before me, having killed the king
O' the Bistones, that drove of Thrakian steeds:
In such case, give the woman back to me!
But should I fare,—as fare I fain would not,
Seeing I hope to prosper and return,—
Then, I bequeath her as thy household slave.
She came into my hands with good hard toil!
For, what find I, when started on my course,
But certain people, a whole country-side,
Holding a wrestling-bout? as good to me
As a new labour: whence I took, and here
Come keeping with me, this, the victor's prize.
For, such as conquered in the easy work,
Gained horses which they drove away: and such
As conquered in the harder,—those who boxed
And wrestled,—cattle; and, to crown the prize,
A woman followed. Chancing as I did,
Base were it to forego this fame and gain!

Well, as I said, I trust her to thy care:
No woman I have kidnapped, understand!
But good hard toil has done it: here I come!
Some day, who knows? even thou wilt praise the feat!"

Admetos raised his face and eyed the pair:
Then, hollowly and with submission, spoke,
And spoke again, and spoke time after time,
When he perceived the silence of his friend
Would not be broken by consenting word.
As a tired slave goes adding stone to stone
Until he stop some current that molests,
So poor Admetos piled up argument
Vainly against the purpose all too plain
In that great brow acquainted with command.

"Nowise dishonouring, nor amid my foes
Ranking thee, did I hide my wife's ill fate;
But it were grief superimposed on grief,
Shouldst thou have hastened to another home.
My own woe was enough for me to weep!
But, for this woman,—if it so may be,—
Bid some Thessalian,—I entreat thee, king!—
Keep her,—who has not suffered like myself!
Many of the Pheraioi welcome thee.
Be no reminder to me of my ills!

I could not, if I saw her come to live,
Restrain the tear! Inflict on me diseased
No new disease: woe bends me down enough!
Then, where could she be sheltered in my house,
Female and young too? For that she is young,
The vesture and adornment prove. Reflect!
Should such an one inhabit the same roof
With men? And how, mixed up, a girl, with youths,
Shall she keep pure, in that case? No light task
To curb the May-day youngster, Herakles!
I only speak because of care for thee.
Or must I, in avoidance of such harm,
Make her to enter, lead her life within
The chamber of the dead one, all apart?
How shall I introduce this other, couch
This where Alkestis lay? A double blame
I apprehend: first, from the citizens—
Lest some tongue of them taunt that I betray
My benefactress, fall into the snare
Of a new fresh face: then, the dead one's self,—
Will she not blame me likewise? Worthy, sure,
Of worship from me! circumspect my ways,
And jealous of a fault, are bound to be.
But thou,—O woman, whosoe'er thou art,—
Know, thou hast all the form, art like as like
Alkestis, in the bodily shape! Ah me!

Take,—by the Gods,—this woman from my sight,
Lest thou undo me, the undone before!
Since I seem—seeing her—as if I saw
My own wife! And confusions cloud my heart,
And from my eyes the springs break forth! Ah me
Unhappy—how I taste for the first time
My misery in all its bitterness!"

Whereat the friends conferred: "The chance, in truth,
Was an untoward one—none said otherwise.
Still, what a God comes giving, good or bad,
That, one should take and bear with. Take her,
then!"

Herakles,—not unfastening his hold
On that same misery, beyond mistake
Hoarse in the words, convulsive in the face,—
"I would that I had such a power," said he,
"As to lead up into the light again
Thy very wife, and grant thee such a grace."

"Well do I know thou wouldst: but where the hope?
There is no bringing back the dead to light."

"Be not extravagant in grief, no less!
Bear it, by augury of better things!"

"'T is easier to advise 'bear up,' than bear!"

"But how carve way i' the life that lies before,
If bent on groaning ever for the past?"

"I myself know that: but a certain love
Allures me to the choice I shall not change."

"Ay, but, still loving dead ones, still makes weep."

"And let it be so! She has ruined me,
And still more than I say: that answers all."

"Oh, thou hast lost a brave wife: who disputes?"

"So brave a one—that he whom thou behold'st
Will never more enjoy his life again!"

"Time will assuage! The evil yet is young!"

"Time, thou mayst say, will; if time mean—to die."

"A wife—the longing for new marriage-joys
Will stop thy sorrow!"

"Hush, friend,—hold thy peace!
What hast thou said! I could not credit ear!"

"How then? Thou wilt not marry, then, but keep
A widowed couch?"
"There is not anyone
Of womankind shall couch with whom thou seest!"

"Dost think to profit thus in any way
The dead one?"
"Her, wherever she abide,
My duty is to honour."
"And I praise—
Indeed I praise thee! Still, thou hast to pay
The price of it, in being held a fool!"

"Fool call me—only one name call me not!
Bridegroom!"
"No: it was praise, I portioned thee,
Of being good true husband to thy wife!"

"When I betray her, though she is no more,
May I die!"
And the thing he said was true:
For out of Herakles a great glow broke.
There stood a victor worthy of a prize:
The violet-crown that withers on the brow
Of the half-hearted claimant. Oh, he knew
The signs of battle hard fought and well won,

This queller of the monsters !—knew his friend
Planted firm foot, now, on the loathly thing
That was Admetos late ! "would die," he knew,
Ere let the reptile raise its crest again.
If that was truth, why try the true friend more ?

"Then, since thou canst be faithful to the death,
Take, deep into thy house, my dame !" smiled he.

"Not so !—I pray, by thy Progenitor !"

"Thou wilt mistake in disobeying me !"

"Obeying thee, I have to break my heart !"

"Obey me ! Who knows but the favour done
May fall into its place as duty too ?"

So, he was humble, would decline no more
Bearing a burden : he just sighed "Alas !
Wouldst thou hadst never brought this prize from game !"

"Yet, when I conquered there, thou conqueredst !"

"All excellently urged ! Yet—spite of all,

Bear with me ! let the woman go away ! "

"She shall go, if needs must : but ere she go,
See if there *is* need ! "
" Need there is ! At least,
Except I make thee angry with me, so ! "

' But I persist, because I have my spice
Of intuition likewise : take the dame ! "

" Be thou the victor, then ! But certainly
Thou dost thy friend no pleasure in the act ! "

"Oh, time will come when thou shalt praise me ! Now—
Only obey ! "
" Then, servants, since my house
Must needs receive this woman, take her there ! "

" I shall not trust this woman to the care
Of servants."
" Why, conduct her in, thyself,
If that seem preferable ! "
" I prefer,
With thy good leave, to place her in thy hands ! "

" I would not touch her ! Entry to the house—

That, I concede thee."
"To thy sole right hand,
I mean to trust her!"
"King! Thou wrenchest this
Out of me by main force, if I submit!"

"Courage, friend! Come, stretch hand forth! Good!
Now touch
The stranger-woman!"
"There! A hand I stretch—
As though it meant to cut off Gorgon's head!"

"Hast hold of her?"
"Fast hold."
"Why, then, hold fast
And have her! and, one day, asseverate
Thou wilt, I think, thy friend, the son of Zeus,
He was the gentle guest to entertain!
Look at her! See if she, in any way,
Present thee with resemblance of thy wife!"

Ah, but the tears come, find the words at fault!
There is no telling how the hero twitched
The veil off: and there stood, with such fixed eyes
And such slow smile, Alkestis' silent self!
It was the crowning grace of that great heart,

To keep back joy : procrastinate the truth
Until the wife, who had made proof and found
The husband wanting, might essay once more,
Hear, see, and feel him renovated now—
Able to do, now, all herself had done,
Risen to the height of her : so, hand in hand,
The two might go together, live and die.

Beside, when he found speech, you guess the speech.
He could not think he saw his wife again :
It was some mocking God that used the bliss
To make him mad ! Till Herakles must help :
Assure him that no spectre mocked at all ;
He was embracing whom he buried once.
Still,—did he touch, might he address the true,—
True eye, true body of the true live wife ?

And Herakles said, smiling, "All was truth.
Spectre ? Admetos had not made his guest
One who played ghost-invoker, or such cheat !
Oh, he might speak and have response, in time !
All heart could wish was gained now—life for death :
Only, the rapture must not grow immense :
Take care, nor wake the envy of the Gods !"

"Oh thou, of greatest Zeus true son,"—so spoke

Admetos when the closing word must come,
"Go ever in a glory of success,
And save, that sire, his offspring to the end!
For thou hast—only thou—raised me and mine
Up again to this light and life!" Then asked
Tremblingly, how was trod the perilous path
Out of the dark into the light and life:
How it had happened with Alkestis there.

And Herakles said little, but enough—
How he engaged in combat with that king
O' the dæmons: how the field of contest lay
By the tomb's self: how he sprang from ambuscade,
Captured Death, caught him in that pair of hands.

But all the time, Alkestis moved not once
Out of the set gaze and the silent smile;
And a cold fear ran through Admetos' frame:
"Why does she stand and front me, silent thus?"

Herakles solemnly replied "Not yet
Is it allowable thou hear the things
She has to tell thee; let evanish quite
That consecration to the lower Gods,
And on our upper world the third day rise!
Lead her in, meanwhile; good and true thou art,

Good, true, remain thou! Practise piety
To stranger-guests the old way! So, farewell!
Since forth I fare, fulfil my urgent task
Set by the king, the son of Sthenelos."

Fain would Admetos keep that splendid smile
Ever to light him. "Stay with us, thou heart!
Remain our house-friend!"

"At some other day!
Now, of necessity, I haste!" smiled he.

"But mayst thou prosper, go forth on a foot
Sure to return! Through all the tetrarchy
Command my subjects that they institute
Thanksgiving-dances for the glad event,
And bid each altar smoke with sacrifice!
For we are minded to begin a fresh
Existence, better than the life before;
Seeing I own myself supremely blest."

Whereupon all the friendly moralists
Drew this conclusion: chirped, each beard to each:
"Manifold are thy shapings, Providence!
Many a hopeless matter Gods arrange.
What we expected never came to pass:

What we did not expect, Gods brought to bear;
So have things gone, this whole experience through!"

Ah, but if you had seen the play itself!
They say, my poet failed to get the prize:
Sophokles got the prize,—great name! They say,
Sophokles also means to make a piece,
Model a new Admetos, a new wife:
Success to him! One thing has many sides.
The great name! But no good supplants a good,
Nor beauty undoes beauty. Sophokles
Will carve and carry a fresh cup, brimful
Of beauty and good, firm to the altar-foot,
And glorify the Dionusiac shrine:
Not clash against this crater in the place
Where the God put it when his mouth had drained,
To the last dregs, libation life-blood-like,
And praised Euripides for evermore—
The Human with his droppings of warm tears.

Still, since one thing may have so many sides,
I think I see how,—far from Sophokles,—
You, I, or anyone might mould a new
Admetos, new Alkestis. Ah, that brave
Bounty of poets, the one royal race

That ever was, or will be, in this world!
They give no gift that bounds itself and ends
I' the giving and the taking: theirs so breeds
I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes
The man who only was a man before,
That he grows godlike in his turn, can give—
He also: share the poets' privilege,
Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old.
As though the cup that gave the wine, gave, too,
The God's prolific giver of the grape,
That vine, was wont to find out, fawn around
His footstep, springing still to bless the dearth,
At bidding of a Mainad. So with me:
For I have drunk this poem, quenched my thirst,
Satisfied heart and soul—yet more remains!
Could we too make a poem? Try at least,
Inside the head, what shape the rose-mists take!

When God Apollon took, for punishment,
A mortal form and sold himself a slave
To King Admetos till a term should end,—
Not only did he make, in servitude,
Such music, while he fed the flocks and herds,
As saved the pasturage from wrong or fright,
Curing rough creatures of ungentleness:
Much more did that melodious wisdom work

Within the heart o' the master: there, ran wild
Many a lust and greed that grow to strength
By preying on the native pity and care,
Would else, all undisturbed, possess the land.

And these, the God so tamed, with golden tongue,
That, in the plenitude of youth and power,
Admetos vowed himself to rule thenceforth
In Pherai solely for his people's sake,
Subduing to such end each lust and greed
That dominates the natural charity.

And so the struggle ended. Right ruled might:
And soft yet brave, and good yet wise, the man
Stood up to be a monarch; having learned
The worth of life, life's worth would he bestow
On all whose lot was cast, to live or die,
As he determined for the multitude.
So stands a statue: pedestalled sublime,
Only that it may wave the thunder off,
And ward, from winds that vex, a world below.

And then,—as if a whisper found its way
E'en to the sense o' the marble,—"Vain thy vow!
The royalty of its resolve, that head
Shall hide within the dust ere day be done:

That arm, its outstretch of beneficence,
Shall have a speedy ending on the earth:
Lie patient, prone, while light some cricket leaps
And takes possession of the masterpiece,
To sit, sing louder as more near the sun.
For why? A flaw was in the pedestal;
Who knows? A worm's work! Sapped, the certain
fate
O' the statue is to fall, and thine to die!"

Whereat the monarch, calm, addressed himself
To die, but bitterly the soul outbroke—
"O prodigality of life, blind waste
I' the world, of power profuse without the will
To make life do its work, deserve its day!
My ancestors pursued their pleasure, poured
The blood o' the people out in idle war,
Or took occasion of some weary peace
To bid men dig down deep or build up high,
Spend bone and marrow that the king might feast
Entrenched and buttressed from the vulgar gaze.
Yet they all lived, nay, lingered to old age:
As though Zeus loved that they should laugh to scorn
The vanity of seeking other ends
In rule than just the ruler's pastime. They
Lived; I must die."

And, as some long last moan
Of a minor suddenly is propped beneath
By note which, new-struck, turns the wail, that was,
Into a wonder and a triumph, so
Began Alkestis: "Nay, thou art to live!
The glory that, in the disguise of flesh,
Was helpful to our house,—he prophesied
The coming fate: whereon, I pleaded sore
That he,—I guessed a God, who to his couch
Amid the clouds must go and come again,
While we were darkling,—since he loved us both,"
He should permit thee, at whatever price,
To live and carry out to heart's content
Soul's purpose, turn each thought to very deed,
Nor let Zeus lose the monarch meant in thee.

To which Apollon, with a sunset smile,
Sadly—"And so should mortals arbitrate!
It were unseemly if they aped us Gods,
And, mindful of our chain of consequence,
Lost care of the immediate earthly link:
Forwent the comfort of life's little hour,
In prospect of some cold abysmal blank
Alien eternity,—unlike the time
They know, and understand to practise with,—
No,—our eternity—no heart's blood, bright

And warm outpoured in its behoof, would tinge
Never so palely, warm a whit the more:
Whereas retained and treasured—left to beat
Joyously on, a life's length, in the breast
O' the loved and loving—it would throb itself
Through, and suffuse the earthly tenement,
Transform it, even as your mansion here
Is love-transformed into a temple-home
Where I, a God, forget the Olumpian glow,
I' the feel of human richness like the rose:
Your hopes and fears, so blind and yet so sweet
With death about them. Therefore, well in thee
To look, not on eternity, but time:
To apprehend that, should Admetos die,
All, we Gods purposed in him, dies as sure:
That, life's link snapping, all our chain is lost.
And yet a mortal glance might pierce, methinks,
Deeper into the seeming dark of things,
And learn, no fruit, man's life can bear, will fade:
Learn, if Admetos die now, so much more
Will pity for the frailness found in flesh,
Will terror at the earthly chance and change
Frustrating wisest scheme of noblest soul,
Will these go wake the seeds of good asleep
Throughout the world: as oft a rough wind sheds
The unripe promise of some field-flower,—true!

But loosens too the level, and lets breathe
A thousand captives for the year to come.
Nevertheless, obtain thy prayer, stay fate!
Admetos lives—if thou wilt die for him!"

"So was the pact concluded that I die,
And thou live on, live for thyself, for me,
For all the world. Embrace and bid me hail,
Husband, because I have the victory—
Am, heart, soul, head to foot, one happiness!"

Whereto Admetos, in a passionate cry,
"Never, by that true word Apollon spoke!
All the unwise wish is unwished, oh wife!
Let purposes of Zeus fulfil themselves,
If not through me, then through some other man!
Still, in myself he had a purpose too,
Inalienably mine, to end with me:
This purpose—that, throughout my earthly life,
Mine should be mingled and made up with thine,—
And we two prove one force and play one part
And do one thing. Since death divides the pair,
'T is well that I depart and thou remain
Who wast to me as spirit is to flesh:
Let the flesh perish, be perceived no more,
So thou, the spirit that informed the flesh,

Bend yet awhile, a very flame above
The rift I drop into the darkness by,—
And bid remember, flesh and spirit once
Worked in the world, one body, for man's sake.
Never be that abominable show
Of passive death without a quickening life—
Admetos only, no Alkestis now!"

Then she: "O thou Admetos, must the pile
Of truth on truth, which needs but one truth more
To tower up in completeness, trophy-like,
Emprize of man, and triumph of the world,
Must it go ever to the ground again
Because of some faint heart or faltering hand,
Which we, that breathless world about the base,
Trusted should carry safe to altitude,
Superimpose o' the summit, our supreme
Achievement, our victorious coping-stone?
Shall thine, Beloved, prove the hand and heart
That fail again, flinch backward at the truth
Would cap and crown the structure this last time,—
Precipitate our monumental hope
And strew the earth ignobly yet once more?
See how, truth piled on truth, the structure wants,
Waits just the crowning truth I claim of thee!
Wouldst thou, for any joy to be enjoyed,

For any sorrow that thou mightst escape,
Unwill thy will to reign a righteous king?
Nowise! And were there two lots, death and life,—
Life, wherein good resolve should go to air,
Death, whereby finest fancy grew plain fact
I' the reign of thy survivor,—life or death?
Certainly death, thou choosest. Here stand I
The wedded, the beloved one. hadst thou loved
Her who less worthily could estimate
Both life and death than thou? Not so should say
Admetos, whom Apollon made come court
Alkestis in a car, submissive brutes
Of blood were yoked to, symbolizing soul
Must dominate unruly sense in man.
Then, shall Admetos and Alkestis see
Good alike, and alike choose, each for each,
Good,—and yet, each for other, at the last,
Choose evil? What? thou soundest in my soul
To depths below the deepest, reachest good
In evil, that makes evil good again,
And so allottest to me that I live
And not die—letting die, not thee alone,
But all true life that lived in both of us?
Look at me once ere thou decree the lot!"

Therewith her whole soul entered into his,

He looked the look back, and Alkestis died.

And even while it lay, i' the look of him,
Dead, the dimmed body, bright Alkestis' soul
Had penetrated through the populace
Of ghosts, was got to Koré,—throned and crowned
The pensive queen o' the twilight, where she dwells
Forever in a muse, but half away
From flowery earth she lost and hankers for,—
And there demanded to become a ghost
Before the time.

Whereat the softened eyes
Of the lost maidenhood that lingered still
Straying among the flowers in Sicily,
Sudden was startled back to Hades' throne
By that demand: broke through humanity
Into the orbed omniscience of a God,
Searched at a glance Alkestis to the soul,
And said—while a long slow sigh lost itself
I' the hard and hollow passage of a laugh:

"Hence, thou deceiver! This is not to die,
If, by the very death which mocks me now,
The life, that 's left behind and past my power,
Is formidably doubled. Say, there fight

Two athletes, side by side, each athlete armed
With only half the weapons, and no more,
Adequate to a contest with their foe:
If one of these should fling helm, sword and shield
To fellow—shieldless, swordless, helmless late—
And so leap naked o'er the barrier, leave
A combatant equipped from head to heel,
Yet cry to the other side 'Receive a friend
Who fights no longer!' 'Back, friend, to the fray!'
Would be the prompt rebuff; I echo it.
Two souls in one were formidable odds:
Admetos must not be himself and thou!"

And so, before the embrace relaxed a whit,
The lost eyes opened, still beneath the look;
And lo, Alkestis was alive again,
And of Admetos' rapture who shall speak?

So, the two lived together long and well.
But never could I learn, by word of scribe
Or voice of poet, rumour wafts our way,
That—of the scheme of rule in righteousness,
The bringing back again the Golden Age,
Which, rather than renounce, our pair would die—
That ever one faint particle came true,
With both alive to bring it to effect:

Such is the envy Gods still bear mankind !

So might our version of the story prove,
And no Euripidean pathos plague
Too much my critic-friend of Syracuse.

" Besides your poem failed to get the prize :
(That is, the first prize : second prize is none).
Sophokles got it ! " Honour the great name !
All cannot love two great names ; yet some do :
I know the poetess who graved in gold,
Among her glories that shall never fade,
This style and title for Euripides,
The Human with his droppings of warm tears.

I know, too, a great Kaunian painter, strong
As Herakles, though rosy with a robe
Of grace that softens down the sinewy strength :
And he has made a picture of it all.
There lies Alkestis dead, beneath the sun,
She longed to look her last upon, beside
The sea, which somehow tempts the life in us
To come trip over its white waste of waves,
And try escape from earth, and fleet as free.
Behind the body, I suppose there bends
Old Pheres in his hoary impotence ;

And women-wailers, in a corner crouch
—Four, beautiful as you four—yes, indeed!—
Close, each to other, agonizing all,
As fastened, in fear's rhythmic sympathy,
To two contending opposite. There strains
The might o' the hero 'gainst his more than match,
—Death, dreadful not in thew and bone, but like
The envenomed substance that exudes some dew
Whereby the merely honest flesh and blood
Will fester up and run to ruin straight,
Ere they can close with, clasp and overcome
The poisonous impalpability
That simulates a form beneath the flow
Of those grey garments; I pronounce that piece
Worthy to set up in our Poikilé!

And all came,—glory of the golden verse,
And passion of the picture, and that fine
Frank outgush of the human gratitude
Which saved our ship and me, in Syracuse,—
Ay, and the tear or two which slipt perhaps
Away from you, friends, while I told my tale,
—It all came of this play that gained no prize!
Why crown whom Zeus has crowned in soul before?

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU,

SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.

Ὕδραν φονεύσας, μυρίων τ' ἄλλων πόνων
διῆλθον ἀγέλας . . .
τὸ λοίσθιον δὲ τόνδ' ἔτλην τάλας πόνον,
. . . δῶμα θριγκῶσαι κακοῖς.

I slew the Hydra, and from labour pass'd
To labour—tribes of labours! Till, at last,
Attempting one more labour, in a trice,
Alack, with ills I *crowned the edifice.*

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU,

SAVIOUR OF SOCIETY.

1871.

You have seen better days, dear? So have I—
And worse too, for they brought no such bud-mouth
As yours to lisp "You wish you knew me!" Well,
Wise men, 't is said, have sometimes wished the same,
And wished and had their trouble for their pains.
Suppose my Œdipus should lurk at last
Under a pork-pie hat and crinoline,
And, lateish, pounce on Sphynx in Leicester Square?
Or likelier, what if Sphynx in wise old age,
Grown sick of snapping foolish people's heads,
And jealous for her riddle's proper rede,—
Jealous that the good trick which served the turn
Have justice rendered it, nor class one day
With friend Home's stilts and tongs and medium-ware,—

What if the once redoubted Sphynx, I say,
(Because night draws on, and the sands increase,
And desert-whispers grow a prophecy)
Tell all to Corinth of her own accord,
Bright Corinth, not dull Thebes, for Laïs' sake,
Who finds me hardly grey, and likes my nose,
And thinks a man of sixty at the prime?
Good! It shall be! Revealment of myself!
But listen, for we must co-operate;
I don't drink tea: permit me the cigar!

First, how to make the matter plain, of course—
What was the law by which I lived. Let 's see:
Ay, we must take one instant of my life
Spent sitting by your side in this neat room:
Watch well the way I use it, and don't laugh!
Here 's paper on the table, pen and ink:
Give me the soiled bit—not the pretty rose!
See! having sat an hour, I 'm rested now,
Therefore want work: and spy no better work
For eye and hand and mind that guides them both,
During this instant, than to draw my pen
From blot One—thus—up, up to blot Two—thus—
Which I at last reach, thus, and here 's my line
Five inches long and tolerably straight:
Better to draw than leave undrawn, I think,

Fitter to do than let alone, I hold,
Though better, fitter, by but one degree.
Therefore it was that, rather than sit still
Simply, my right-hand drew it while my left
Pulled smooth and pinched the moustache to a point.

Now I permit your plump lips to unpurse:
"So far, one possibly may understand
"Without recourse to witchcraft!" True, my dear.
Thus folks begin with Euclid,—finish, how?
Trying to square the circle!—at any rate,
Solving abstruser problems than this first
"How find the nearest way 'twixt point and point."
Deal but with moral mathematics so—
Master one merest moment's work of mine,
Even this practising with pen and ink,—
Demonstrate why I rather plied the quill
Than left the space a blank,—you gain a fact,
And God knows what a fact 's worth! So proceed
By inference from just this moral fact
—I don't say, to that plaguy quadrature
"What the whole man meant, whom you wish you knew,"
But, what meant certain things he did of old,
Which puzzled Europe,—why, you 'll find them plain,
This way, not otherwise: I guarantee,
Understand one, you comprehend the rest.

Rays from all round converge to any point:
Study the point then ere you track the rays!
The size o' the circle 's nothing; subdivide
Earth, and earth's smallest grain of mustard-seed,
You count as many parts, small matching large,
If you can use the mind's eye: otherwise,
Material optics, being gross at best,
Prefer the large and leave our mind the small—
And pray how many folk have minds can see?
Certainly you—and somebody in Thrace
Whose name escapes me at the moment. You—
Lend me your mind then! Analyse with me
This instance of the line 'twixt blot and blot
I rather chose to draw than leave a blank,
Things else being equal. You are taught thereby
That 't is my nature, when I am at ease,
Rather than idle out my life too long,
To want to do a thing—to put a thought,
Whether a great thought or a little one,
Into an act, as nearly as may be.
Make what is absolutely new—I can't,
Mar what is made already well enough—
I won't: but turn to best account the thing
That 's half-made—that I can. Two blots, you saw
I knew how to extend into a line
Symmetric on the sheet they blurred before—

Such little act sufficed, this time, such thought.

Now, we 'll extend rays, widen out the verge,
Describe a larger circle; leave this first
Clod of an instance we began with, rise
To the complete world many clods effect.
Only continue patient while I throw,
Delver-like, spadeful after spadeful up,
Just as truths come, the subsoil of me, mould
Whence spring my moods: your object,—just to find,
Alike from handlift and from barrow-load,
What salts and silts may constitute the earth—
If it be proper stuff to blow man glass,
Or bake him pottery, bear him oaks or wheat—
What 's born of me, in brief; which found, all 's known.
If it were genius did the digging-job,
Logic would speedily sift its product smooth
And leave the crude truths bare for poetry;
But I 'm no poet, and am stiff i' the back.
What one spread fails to bring, another may.
In goes the shovel and out comes scoop—as here!

I live to please myself. I recognize
Power passing mine, immeasurable, God—
Above me, whom He made, as heaven beyond
Earth—to use figures which assist our sense.

I know that He is there as I am here,
By the same proof, which seems no proof at all,
It so exceeds familiar forms of proof.
Why "there," not "here"? Because, when I say "there,"
I treat the feeling with distincter shape
That space exists between us: I,—not He,—
Live, think, do human work here—no machine,
His will moves, but a being by myself,
His, and not He who made me for a work,
Watches my working, judges its effect,
But does not interpose. He did so once,
And probably will again some time—not now,
Life being the minute of mankind, not God's,
In a certain sense, like time before and time
After man's earthly life, so far as man
Needs apprehend the matter. Am I clear?
Suppose I bid a courier take to-night
(. . . Once for all, let me talk as if I smoked
Yet in the Residenz, a personage:
I must still represent the thing I was,
Galvanically make dead muscle play,
Or how shall I illustrate muscle's use?)
I could then, last July, bid courier take
Message for me, post-haste, a thousand miles.
I bid him, since I have the right to bid,
And, my part done so far, his part begins;

He starts with due equipment, will and power,
Means he may use, misuse, not use at all,
At his discretion, at his peril too.
I leave him to himself: but, journey done,
I count the minutes, call for the result
In quickness and the courier quality,
Weigh its worth, and then punish or reward
According to proved service; not before.
Meantime, he sleeps through noontide, rides till dawn,
Sticks to the straight road, tries the crooked path,
Measures and manages resource, trusts, doubts
Advisers by the wayside, does his best
At his discretion, lags or launches forth,
(He knows and I know) at his peril too.
You see? Exactly thus men stand to God:
I with my courier, God with me. Just so
I have His bidding to perform; but mind
And body, all of me, though made and meant
For that sole service, must consult, concert
With my own self and nobody beside,
How to effect the same: God helps not else.
'T is I who, with my stock of craft and strength,
Choose the directer cut across the hedge,
Or keep the foot-track that respects a crop.
Lie down and rest, rise up and run,—live spare,
Feed free,—all that 's my business: but, arrive,

Deliver message, bring the answer back,
And make my bow, I must: then God will speak,
Praise me or haply blame as service proves.
To other men, to each and everyone,
Another law! what likelier? God, perchance,
Grants each new man, by some as new a mode,
Intercommunication with Himself,
Wreaking on finiteness infinitude;
By such a series of effects, gives each
Last His own imprint: old yet ever new
The process: 't is the way of Deity.
How it succeeds, He knows: I only know
That varied modes of creatureship abound,
Implying just as varied intercourse
For each with the creator of them all.
Each has his own mind and no other's mode.
What mode may yours be? I shall sympathize!
No doubt, you, good young lady that you are,
Despite a natural naughtiness or two,
Turn eyes up like a Pradier Magdalen
And see an outspread providential hand
Above the owl's-wing aigrette—guard and guide—
Visibly o'er your path, about your bed,
Through all your practisings with London-town.
It points, you go; it stays fixed, and you stop;
You quicken its procedure by a word

Spoken, a thought in silence, prayer and praise.
Well, I believe that such a hand may stoop,
And such appeals to it may stave off harm,
Pacify the grim guardian of this Square,
And stand you in good stead on quarter-day:
Quite possible in your case; not in mine.
"Ah, but I choose to make the difference,
Find the emancipation?" No, I hope!
If I deceive myself, take noon for night,
Please to become determinedly blind
To the true ordinance of human life,
Through mere presumption—that is my affair,
And truly a grave one; but as grave I think
Your affair, yours, the specially observed,—
Each favoured person that perceives his path
Pointed him, inch by inch, and looks above
For guidance, through the mazes of this world,
In what we call its meanest life-career
—Not how to manage Europe properly,
But how keep open shop, and yet pay rent,
Rear household, and make both ends meet, the same.
I say, such man is no less tasked than I
To duly take the path appointed him
By whatsoever sign he recognize.
Our insincerity on both our heads!
No matter what the object of a life,

Small work or large,—the making thrive a shop,
Or seeing that an empire take no harm,—
There are known fruits to judge obedience by.
You 've read a ton's weight, now, of newspaper—
Lives of me, gabble about the kind of prince—
You know my work i' the rough; I ask you, then,
Do I appear subordinated less
To hand-impulsion, one prime push for all,
Than little lives of men, the multitude
That cried out, every quarter of an hour,
For fresh instructions, did or did not work,
And praised in the odd minutes?

Eh, my dear?
Such is the reason why I acquiesced
In doing what seemed best for me to do,
So as to please myself on the great scale,
Having regard to immortality
No less than life—did that which head and heart
Prescribed my hand, in measure with its means
Of doing—used my special stock of power—
Not from the aforesaid head and heart alone,
But every sort of helpful circumstance,
Some problematic and some nondescript:
All regulated by the single care
I' the last resort—that I made thoroughly serve

The when and how, toiled where was need, reposed
As resolutely at the proper point,
Braved sorrow, courted joy, to just one end:
Namely, that just the creature I was bound
To be, I should become, nor thwart at all
God's purpose in creation. I conceive
No other duty possible to man,—
Highest mind, lowest mind, no other law
By which to judge life failure or success:
What folk call being saved or cast away.

Such was my rule of life: I worked my best
Subject to ultimate judgment, God's not man's
Well then, this settled,—take your tea, I beg,
And meditate the fact, 'twixt sip and sip,—
This settled—why I pleased myself, you saw,
By turning blot and blot into a line,
O' the little scale,—we 'll try now (as your tongue
Tries the concluding sugar-drop) what 's meant
To please me most o' the great scale. Why, just now,
With nothing else to do within my reach,
Did I prefer making two blots one line
To making yet another separate
Third blot, and leaving those I found unlinked?
It meant, I like to use the thing I find,
Rather than strive at unfound novelty:

I make the best of the old, nor try for new.
Such will to act, such choice of action's way,
Constitute—when at work on the great scale,
Driven to their farthest natural consequence
By all the help from all the means—my own
Particular faculty of serving God,
Instinct for putting power to exercise
Upon some wish and want o' the time, I prove
Possible to mankind as best I may.
This constitutes my mission,—grant the phrase,—
Namely, to rule men—men within my reach,
To order, influence and dispose them so
As render solid and stabilify
Mankind in particles, the light and loose,
For their good and my pleasure in the act.
Such good accomplished proves twice good to me—
Good for its own sake, as the just and right,
And, in the effecting also, good again
To me its agent, tasked as suits my taste.

Is this much easy to be understood
At first glance? Now begin the steady gaze!

My rank—(if I must tell you simple truth—
Telling were else not worth the whiff o' the weed
I lose for the tale's sake)—dear, my rank i' the world

Is hard to know and name precisely: err
I may, but scarcely over-estimate
My style and title. Do I class with men
Most useful to their fellows? Possibly,—
Therefore, in some sort, best; but, greatest mind
And rarest nature? Evidently no.
A conservator, call me, if you please,
Not a creator nor destroyer: one
Who keeps the world safe. I profess to trace
The broken circle of society,
Dim actual order, I can redescribe
Not only where some segment silver-true
Stays clear, but where the breaks of black commence
Baffling you all who want the eye to probe—
As I make out yon problematic thin
White paring of your thumb-nail outside there,
Above the plaster-monarch on his steed—
See an inch, name an ell, and prophecy
O' the rest that ought to follow, the round moon
Now hiding in the night of things: that round,
I labour to demonstrate moon enough
For the month's purpose,—that society,
Render efficient for the age's need:
Preserving you in either case the old,
Nor aiming at a new and greater thing,
A sun for moon, a future to be made

By first abolishing the present law:
No such proud task for me by any means!
History shows you men whose master-touch
Not so much modifies as makes anew:
Minds that transmute nor need restore at all.
A breath of God made manifest in flesh
Subjects the world to change, from time to time,
Alters the whole conditions of our race
Abruptly, not by unperceived degrees
Nor play of elements already there,
But quite new leaven, leavening the lump,
And liker, so, the natural process. See!
Where winter reigned for ages—by a turn
I' the time, some star-change, (ask geologists)
The ice-tracts split, clash, splinter and disperse,
And there 's an end of immobility,
Silence, and all that tinted pageant, base
To pinnacle, one flush from fairyland
Dead-asleep and deserted somewhere,—see!—
As a fresh sun, wave, spring and joy outburst.
Or else the earth it is, time starts from trance,
Her mountains tremble into fire, her plains
Heave blinded by confusion: what result?
New teeming growth, surprises of strange life
Impossible before, a world broke up
And re-made, order gained by law destroyed.

Not otherwise, in our society
Follow like portents, all as absolute
Regenerations: they have birth at rare
Uncertain unexpected intervals
O' the world, by ministry impossible
Before and after fulness of the days:
Some dervish desert-spectre, swordsman, saint,
Law-giver, lyrist,—oh, we know the names!
Quite other these than I. Our time requires
No such strange potentate,—who else would dawn,—
No fresh force till the old have spent itself.
Such seems the natural œconomy.
To shoot a beam into the dark, assists:
To make that beam do fuller service, spread
And utilize such bounty to the height,
That assists also,—and that work is mine.
I recognize, contemplate, and approve
The general compact of society,
Not simply as I see effected good,
But good i' the germ, each chance that 's possible
I' the plan traced so far: all results, in short,
For better or worse of the operation due
To those exceptional natures, unlike mine,
Who, helping, thwarting, conscious, unaware,
Did somehow manage to so far describe
This diagram left ready to my hand,

Waiting my turn of trial. I see success,
See failure, see what makes or mars throughout.
How shall I else but help complete this plan
Of which I know the purpose and approve,
By letting stay therein what seems to stand,
And adding good thereto of easier reach
To-day than yesterday?

So much, no more!
Whereon, "No more than that?"—inquire aggrieved
Half of my critics: "nothing new at all?
The old plan saved, instead of a sponged slate
And fresh-drawn figure?"—while, "So much as that?"
Object their fellows of the other faith:
"Leave uneffaced the crazy labyrinth
Of alteration and amendment, lines
Which every dabster felt in duty bound
To signalize his power of pen and ink
By adding to a plan once plain enough?
Why keep each fool's bequeathment, scratch and blur
Which overscrawl and underscore the piece—
Nay, strengthen them by touches of your own?"

Well, that's my mission, so I serve the world,
Figure as man o' the moment,—in default
Of somebody inspired to strike such change

Into society—from round to square,
The ellipsis to the rhomboid, how you please,
As suits the size and shape o' the world he finds.
But this I can,—and nobody my peer,—
Do the best with the least change possible:
Carry the incompleteness on, a stage,
Make what was crooked straight, and roughness smooth,
And weakness strong: wherein if I succeed,
It will not prove the worst achievement, sure,
In the eyes at least of one man, one I look
Nowise to catch in critic company:
To-wit, the man inspired, the genius' self
Destined to come and change things thoroughly.
He, at least, finds his business simplified,
Distinguishes the done from undone, reads
Plainly what meant and did not mean this time
We live in, and I work on, and transmit
To such successor: he will operate
On good hard substance, not mere shade and shine.
Let all my critics, born to idleness
And impotency, get their good, and have
Their hooting at the giver: I am deaf—
Who find great good in this society,
Great gain, the purchase of great labour. Touch
The work I may and must, but—reverent
In every fall o' the finger-tip, no doubt.

Perhaps I find all good there 's warrant for
I' the world as yet: nay, to the end of time,—
Since evil never means part company
With mankind, only shift side and change shape.
I find advance i' the main, and notably
The Present an improvement on the Past,
And promise for the Future—which shall prove
Only the Present with its rough made smooth,
Its indistinctness emphasized; I hope
No better, nothing newer for mankind,
But something equably smoothed everywhere,
Good, reconciled with hardly-quite-as-good,
Instead of good and bad each jostling each.
"And that 's all?" Ay, and quite enough for me!
We have toiled so long to gain what gain I find
I' the Present,—let us keep it! We shall toil
So long before we gain—if gain God grant—
A Future with one touch of difference
I' the heart of things, and not their outside face,—
Let us not risk the whiff of my cigar
For Fourier, Comte, and all that ends in smoke!

This I see clearest probably of men
With power to act and influence, now alive:
Juster than they to the true state of things;
In consequence, more tolerant that, side

By side, shall co-exist and thrive alike
In the age, the various sorts of happiness
Moral, mark !—not material—moods o' the mind
Suited to man and man his opposite :
Say, minor modes of movement—hence to there,
Or thence to here, or simply round about—
So long as each toe spares its neighbour's kibe,
Nor spoils the major march and main advance.
The love of peace, care for the family,
Contentment with what 's bad but might be worse—
Good movements these ! and good, too, discontent,
So long as that spurs good, which might be best,
Into becoming better, anyhow :
Good—pride of country, putting hearth and home
I' the back-ground, out of undue prominence :
Good—yearning after change, strife, victory,
And triumph. Each shall have its orbit marked,
But no more,—none impede the other's path
In this wide world,—though each and all alike
Save for me, fain would spread itself through space
And leave its fellow not an inch of way.
I rule and regulate the course, excite,
Restrain : because the whole machine should march
Impelled by those diversely-moving parts,
Each blind to aught beside its little bent.
Out of the turnings round and round inside,

Comes that straightforward world-advance, I want,
And none of them supposes God wants too
And gets through just their hindrance and my help.
I think that to have held the balance straight
For twenty years, say, weighing claim and claim,
And giving each its due, no less no more,
This was good service to humanity,
Right usage of my power in head and heart,
And reasonable piety beside.
Keep those three points in mind while judging me!
You stand, perhaps, for some one man, not men,—
Represent this or the other interest,
Nor mind the general welfare,—so, impugn
My practice and dispute my value: why?
You man of faith, I did not tread the world
Into a paste, and thereof make a smooth
Uniform mound whereon to plant your flag,
The lily-white, above the blood and brains!
Nor yet did I, you man of faithlessness,
So roll things to the level which you love,
That you could stand at ease there and survey
The universal Nothing undisgraced
By pert obtrusion of some old church-spire
I' the distance! Neither friend would I content,
Nor, as the world were simply meant for him,
Thrust out his fellow and mend God's mistake.

Why, you two fools,—my dear friends all the same,—
Is it some change o' the world and nothing else
Contents you? Should whatever was, not be?
How thanklessly you view things! There 's the root
Of the evil, source of the entire mistake:
You see no worth i' the world, nature and life,
Unless we change what is to what may be,
Which means,—may be, i' the brain of one of you!
"Reject what is?"—all capabilities—
Nay, you may style them chances if you choose—
All chances, then, of happiness that lie
Open to anybody that is born,
Tumbles into this life and out again,—
All that may happen, good and evil too,
I' the space between, to each adventurer
Upon this 'sixty, Anno Domini:
A life to live—and such a life! a world
To learn, one's lifetime in,—and such a world!
How did the foolish ever pass for wise
By calling life a burden, man a fly
Or worm or what 's most insignificant?
"O littleness of man!" deplores the bard;
And then, for fear the Powers should punish him,
"O grandeur of the visible universe
Our human littleness contrasts withal!
O sun, O moon, ye mountains and thou sea,

Thou emblem of immensity, thou this,
That, and the other,—what impertinence
In man to eat and drink and walk about
And have his little notions of his own,
The while some wave sheds foam upon the shore!"
First of all, 't is a lie some three-times thick:
The bard,—this sort of speech being poetry,—
The bard puts mankind well outside himself
And then begins instructing them: "This way
I and my friend the sea conceive of you!
What would you give to think such thoughts as ours
Of you and the sea together?" Down they go
On the humbled knees of them: at once they draw
Distinction, recognize no mate of theirs
In one, despite his mock humility,
So plain a match for what he plays with. Next,
The turn of the great ocean-playfellow,
When the bard, leaving Bond Street very far
From ear-shot, cares not to ventriloquize,
But tells the sea its home-truths: "You, my match?
You, all this terror and immensity
And what not? Shall I tell you what you are?
Just fit to hitch into a stanza, so
Wake up and set in motion who 's asleep
O' the other side of you in England, else
Unaware, as folk pace their Bond Street now,

Somebody here despises them so much!
Between us,—they are the ultimate! to them
And their perception go these lordly thoughts:
Since what were ocean—mane and tail, to boot—
Mused I not here, how make thoughts thinkable?
Start forth my stanza and astound the world!
Back, billows, to your insignificance!
Deep, you are done with!"

Learn, my gifted friend,
There are two things i' the world, still wiser folk
Accept—intelligence and sympathy.
You pant about unutterable power
I' the ocean, all you feel but cannot speak?
Why, that 's the plainest speech about it all.
You did not feel what was not to be felt.
Well, then, all else but what man feels is nought—
The wash o' the liquor that o'erbrims the cup
Called man, and runs to waste adown his side,
Perhaps to feed a cataract,—who cares?
I 'll tell you: all the more I know mankind,
The more I thank God, like my grandmother,
For making me a little lower than
The angels, honour-clothed and glory-crowned
This is the honour,— that no thing I know,
Feel or conceive, but I can make my own

Somehow, by use of hand or head or heart:
This is the glory,—that in all conceived,
Or felt or known, I recognize a mind
Not mine but like mine,—for the double joy,—
Making all things for me and me for Him.
There 's folly for you at this time of day!
So think it! and enjoy your ignorance
Of what—no matter for the worthy's name—
Wisdom set working in a noble heart,
When he, who was earth's best geometer
Up to that time of day, consigned his life
With its results into one matchless book,
The triumph of the human mind so far,
All in geometry man yet could do:
And then wrote on the dedication-page
In place of name the universe applauds,
"But, God, what a geometer art Thou!"
I suppose Heaven is, through Eternity,
The equalizing, ever and anon,
In momentary rapture, great with small,
Omniscience with intelligency, God
With man,—the thunder-glow from pole to pole
Abolishing, a blissful moment-space,
Great cloud alike and small cloud, in one fire—
As sure to ebb as sure again to flow
When the new receptivity deserves

The new completion. There 's the Heaven for me.
And I say, therefore, to live out one's life
I' the world here, with the chance,—whether by pain
Or pleasure be the process, long or short
The time, august or mean the circumstance
To human eye,—of learning how set foot
Decidedly on some one path to Heaven,
Touch segment in the circle whence all lines
Lead to the centre equally, red lines
Or black lines, so they but produce themselves—
This, I do say,—and here my sermon ends,—
This makes it worth our while to tenderly
Handle a state of things which mend we might,
Mar we may, but which meanwhile helps so far.
Therefore my end is—save society!

"And that 's all?" twangs the never-failing taunt
O' the foe—"No novelty, creativeness,
Mark of the master that renews the age?"
"Nay, all that?" rather will demur my judge
I look to hear some day, nor friend nor foe—
"Did you attain, then, to perceive that God
Knew what He undertook when He made things?"
Ay: that my task was to co-operate
Rather than play the rival, chop and change
The order whence comes all the good we know,

With this,—good's last expression to our sense,—
That there 's a further good conceivable
Beyond the utmost earth can realize:
And, therefore, that to change the agency,
The evil whereby good is brought about—
Try to make good do good as evil does—
Were just as if a chemist, wanting white,
And knowing black ingredients bred the dye,
Insisted these too should be white forsooth!
Correct the evil, mitigate your best,
Blend mild with harsh, and soften black to gray
If gray may follow with no detriment
To the eventual perfect purity!
But as for hazarding the main result
By hoping to anticipate one half
In the intermediate process,—no, my friends!
This bad world, I experience and approve;
Your good world,—with no pity, courage, hope,
Fear, sorrow, joy,—devotedness, in short,
Which I account the ultimate of man,
Of which there 's not one day nor hour but brings,
In flower or fruit, some sample of success,
Out of this same society I save—
None of it for me! That I might have none,
I rapped your tampering knuckles twenty years.
Such was the task imposed me, such my end.

Now for the means thereto. Ah, confidence—
Keep we together or part company?
This is the critical minute! "Such my end?"
Certainly; how could it be otherwise?
Can there be question which was the right task—
To save or to destroy society?
Why, even prove that, by some miracle,
Destruction were the proper work to choose,
And that a torch best remedies what 's wrong
I' the temple, whence the long procession wound
Of powers and beauties, earth's achievements all,
The human strength that strove and overthrew,—
The human love that, weak itself, crowned strength,—
The instinct crying "God is whence I came!"—
The reason laying down the law "And such
His will i' the world must be!"—the leap and shout
Of genius "For I hold His very thoughts,
The meaning of the mind of Him!"—nay, more,
The ingenuities, each active force
That turning in a circle on itself
Looks neither up nor down but keeps the spot,
Mere creature-like, and, for religion, works,
Works only and works ever, makes and shapes
And changes, still wrings more of good from less,
Still stamps some bad out, where was worst before,
So leaves the handiwork, the act and deed,

Were it but house and land and wealth, to show
Here was a creature perfect in the kind—
Whether as bee, beaver, or behemoth,
What 's the importance? he has done his work
For work's sake, worked well, earned a creature's
praise;—
I say, concede that same fane, whence deploys
Age after age, all this humanity,
Diverse but ever dear, out of the dark
Behind the altar into the broad day
By the portal—enter, and, concede there mocks
Each lover of free motion and much space
A perplexed length of apse and aisle and nave,—
Pillared roof and carved screen, and what care I?—
Which irk the movement and impede the march,—
Nay, possibly, bring flat upon his nose
At some odd break-neck angle, by some freak
Of old-world artistry, that personage
Who, could he but have kept his skirts from grief
And catching at the hooks and crooks about,
Had stepped out on the daylight of our time
Plainly the man of the age,—still, still, I bar
Excessive conflagration in the case.
"Shake the flame freely!" shout the multitude:
The architect approves I stuck my torch
Inside a good stout lantern, hung its light

Above the hooks and crooks, and ended so.
To save society was well: the means
Whereby to save it,—there begins the doubt
Permitted you, imperative on me;
Were mine the best means? Did I work aright
With powers appointed me?—since powers denied
Concern me nothing.

Well, my work reviewed
Fairly, leaves more hope than discouragement.
First, there 's the deed done: what I found, I leave,—
What tottered, I kept stable: if it stand
One month, without sustainment, still thank me
The twenty years' sustainer! Now, observe,
Sustaining is no brilliant self-display
Like knocking down or even setting up:
Much bustle these necessitate; and still
To vulgar eye, the mightier of the myth
Is Hercules, who substitutes his own
For Atlas' shoulder and supports the globe
A whole day,—not the passive and obscure
Atlas who bore, ere Hercules was born,
And is to go on bearing that same load
When Hercules turns ash on Œta's top.
'T is the transition-stage, the tug and strain,
That strike men: standing still is stupid-like.

My pressure was too constant on the whole
For any part's eruption into space
Mid sparkles, crackling, and much praise of me.
I saw that, in the ordinary life,
Many of the little make a mass of men
Important beyond greatness here and there;
As certainly as, in life exceptional,
When old things terminate and new commence,
A solitary great man 's worth the world.
God takes the business into His own hands
At such time: who creates the novel flower
Contrives to guard and give it breathing-room:
I merely tend the corn-field, care for crop,
And weed no acre thin to let emerge
What prodigy may stifle there perchance,
—No, though my eye have noted where he lurks.
Oh those mute myriads that spoke loud to me—
The eyes that craved to see the light, the mouths
That sought the daily bread and nothing more,
The hands that supplicated exercise,
Men that had wives, and women that had babes,
And all these making suit to only live!
Was I to turn aside from husbandry,
Leave hope of harvest for the corn, my care,
To play at horticulture, rear some rose
Or poppy into perfect leaf and bloom

When, mid the furrows, up was pleased to sprout
Some man, cause, system, special interest
I ought to study, stop the world meanwhile?
"But I am Liberty, Philanthropy,
Enlightenment, or Patriotism, the power
Whereby you are to stand or fall!" cries each:
"Mine and mine only be the flag you flaunt!"
And, when I venture to object "Meantime,
What of yon myriads with no flag at all—
My crop which, who flaunts flag must tread across?"
"Now, this it is to have a puny mind!"
Admire my mental prodigies: "down—down—
Ever at home o' the level and the low,
There bides he brooding! Could he look above,
With less of the owl and more of the eagle eye,
He 'd see there 's no way helps the little cause
Like the attainment of the great. Dare first
The chief emprize; dispel yon cloud between
The sun and us; nor fear that, though our heads
Find earlier warmth and comfort from his ray,
What lies about our feet, the multitude,
Will fail of benefaction presently.
Come now, let each of us awhile cry truce
To special interests, make common cause
Against the adversary—or perchance
Mere dullard to his own plain interest!

Which of us will you choose?—since needs must be
Some one o' the warring causes you incline
To hold, i' the main, has right and should prevail:
Why not adopt and give it prevalence?
Choose strict Faith or lax Incredulity,—
King, Caste and Cultus—or the Rights of Man,
Sovereignty of each Proudhon o'er himself,
And all that follows in just consequence!
Go free the stranger from a foreign yoke;
Or stay, concentrate energy at home;
Succeed!—when he deserves, the stranger will.
Comply with the Great Nation's impulse, print
By force of arms,—since reason pleads in vain,
And, mid the sweet compulsion, pity weeps,—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau on the universe!
Snub the Great Nation, cure the impulsive itch
With smartest fillip on a restless nose
Was ever launched by thumb and finger! Bid
Hohenstiel-Schwangau first repeal the tax
On pig-tails and pomatum, and then mind
Abstruser matters for next century!
Is your choice made? Why then, act up to choice!
Leave the illogical touch now here now there
I' the way of work, the tantalizing help
First to this, then the other opposite:
The blowing hot and cold, sham policy,

Sure ague of the mind and nothing more,
Disease of the perception or the will,
That fain would hide in a fine name! Your choice,
Speak it out and condemn yourself thereby!"

Well, Leicester-square is not the Residenz:
Instead of shrugging shoulder, turning friend
The deaf ear, with a wink to the police—
I 'll answer—by a question, wisdom's mode.
How many years, o' the average, do men
Live in this world? Some score, say computists.
Quintuple me that term and give mankind
The likely hundred, and with all my heart
I 'll take your task upon me, work your way,
Concentrate energy on some one cause:
Since, counseller, I also have my cause,
My flag, my faith in its effect, my hope
In its eventual triumph for the good
O' the world. And once upon a time, when I
Was like all you, mere voice and nothing more,
Myself took wings, soared sunward, and thence sang
"Look where I live i' the loft, come up to me,
Groundlings, nor grovel longer! gain this height,
And prove you breathe here better than below!
Why, what emancipation far and wide
Will follow in a trice! They too can soar,

Each tenant of the earth's circumference
Claiming to elevate humanity,
They also must attain such altitude,
Live in the luminous circle that surrounds
The planet, not the leaden orb itself.
Press out, each point, from surface to yon verge
Which one has gained and guaranteed your realm!"
Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,
Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine
For ever! Crumbled arch, crushed aqueduct,
Alive with tremors in the shaggy growth
Of wild-wood, crevice-sown, that triumphs there
Imparting exultation to the hills!
Sweep of the swathe when only the winds walk
And waft my words above the grassy sea
Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome,—
Hear ye not still—"Be Italy again"?
And ye, what strikes the panic to your heart?
Decrepit council-chambers,—where some lamp
Drives the unbroken black three paces off
From where the greybeards huddle in debate,
Dim cowls and capes, and midmost glimmers one
Like tarnished gold, and what they say is doubt,
And what they think is fear, and what suspends
The breath in them is not the plaster-patch
Time disengages from the painted wall

Where Rafael moulderingly bids adieu,
Nor tick of the insect turning tapestry
Which a queen's finger traced of old, to dust;
But some word, resonant, redoubtable,
Of who once felt upon his head a hand
Whereof the head now apprehends his foot.
"Light in Rome, Law in Rome, and Liberty
O' the soul in Rome—the free Church, the free State!
Stamp out the nature that 's best typified
By its embodiment in Peter's Dome,
The scorpion-body with the greedy pair
Of outstretched nippers, either colonnade
Agape for the advance of heads and hearts!"
There 's one cause for you! one and only one,
For I am vocal through the universe,
I' the workshop, manufactory, exchange
And market-place, sea-port and custom-house
O' the frontier: listen if the echoes die—
"Unfettered commerce! Power to speak and hear,
And print and read! The universal vote!
Its rights for labour!" This, with much beside,
I spoke when I was voice and nothing more,
But altogether such an one as you
My censors. "Voice, and nothing more, indeed!"
Re-echoes round me: "that 's the censure, there 's
Involved the ruin of you soon or late!

Voice,—when its promise beat the empty air:
And nothing more,—when solid earth 's your stage,
And we desiderate performance, deed
For word, the realizing all you dreamed
In the old days: now, for deed, we find at door
O' the council-chamber posted, mute as mouse,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, sentry and safeguard
O' the greybeards all a-chuckle, cowl to cape,
Who challenge Judas,—that 's endearment's style,—
To stop their mouths or let escape grimace,
While they keep cursing Italy and him.
The power to speak, hear, print and read is ours?
Ay, we learn where and how, when clapped inside
A convict-transport bound for cool Cayenne!
The universal vote we have: its urn,
We also have where votes drop, fingered-o'er
By the universal Prefect. Say, Trade 's free
And Toil turned master out o' the slave it was:
What then? These feed man's stomach, but his soul
Craves finer fare, nor lives by bread alone,
As somebody says somewhere. Hence you stand
Proved and recorded either false or weak,
Faulty in promise or performance: which?"
Neither, I hope. Once pedestalled on earth,
To act not speak, I found earth was not air.
I saw that multitude of mine, and not

The nakedness and nullity of air
Fit only for a voice to float in free.
Such eyes I saw that craved the light alone,
Such mouths that wanted bread and nothing else,
Such hands that supplicated handiwork,
Men with the wives, and women with the babes,
Yet all these pleading just to live, not die!
Did I believe one whit less in belief,
Take truth for falsehood, wish the voice revoked
That told the truth to heaven for earth to hear?
No, this should be, and shall; but when and how?
At what expense to these who average
Your twenty years of life, my computists?
"Not bread alone" but bread before all else
For these: the bodily want serve first, said I;
If earth-space and the life-time help not here,
Where is the good of body having been?
But, helping body, if we somewhat baulk
The soul of finer fare, such food 's to find
Elsewhere and afterward—all indicates,
Even this self-same fact that soul can starve
Yet body still exist its twenty years:
While, stint the body, there 's an end at once
O' the revel in the fancy that Rome 's free,
And superstition 's fettered, and one prints
Whate'er one pleases and who pleases reads

The same, and speaks out and is spoken to,
And divers hundred thousand fools may vote
A vote untampered with by one wise man,
And so elect Barabbas deputy
In lieu of his concurrent. I who trace
The purpose written on the face of things,
For my behoof and guidance—(whoso needs
No such sustainment, sees beneath my signs,
Proves, what I take for writing, penmanship,
Scribble and flourish with no sense for me
O' the sort I solemnly go spelling out,—
Let him! there 's certain work of mine to show
Alongside his work: which gives warranty
Of shrewder vision in the workman—judge!)
I who trace Providence without a break
I' the plan of things, drop plumb on this plain print
Of an intention with a view to good,
That man is made in sympathy with man
At outset of existence, so to speak;
But in dissociation, more and more,
Man from his fellow, as their lives advance
In culture; still humanity, that 's born
A mass, keeps flying off, fining away
Ever into a multitude of points,
And ends in isolation, each from each:
Peerless above i' the sky, the pinnacle,—

Absolute contact, fusion, all below
At the base of being. How comes this about?
This stamp of God characterizing man
And nothing else but man in the universe—
That, while he feels with man (to use man's speech)
I' the little things of life, its fleshly wants
Of food and rest and health and happiness,
Its simplest spirit-motions, loves and hates,
Hopes, fears, soul-cravings on the ignoblest scale,
O' the fellow-creature,—owns the bond at base,—
He tends to freedom and divergency
In the upward progress, plays the pinnacle
When life 's at greatest (grant again the phrase!
Because there 's neither great nor small in life).
"Consult thou for thy kind that have the eyes
To see, the mouths to eat, the hands to work,
Men with the wives, and women with the babes!"
Prompts Nature. "Care thou for thyself alone
I' the conduct of the mind God made thee with!
Think, as if man had never thought before!
Act, as if all creation hung attent
On the acting of such faculty as thine,
To take prime pattern from thy masterpiece!"
Nature prompts also: neither law obeyed
To the uttermost by any heart and soul
We know or have in record: both of them

Acknowledged blindly by whatever man
We ever knew or heard of in this world.
"Will you have why and wherefore, and the fact
Made plain as pikestaff?" modern Science asks.
"That mass man sprung from was a jelly-lump
Once on a time; he kept an after course
Through fish and insect, reptile, bird and beast,
Till he attained to be an ape at last
Or last but one. And if this doctrine shock
In aught the natural pride" . . . Friend, banish fear,
The natural humility replies!
Do you suppose, even I, poor potentate,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, who once ruled the roast,—
I was born able at all points to ply
My tools? or did I have to learn my trade,
Practise as exile ere perform as prince?
The world knows something of my ups and downs:
But grant me time, give me the management
And manufacture of a model me,
Me fifty-fold, a prince without a flaw,—
Why, there 's no social grade, the sordidest,
My embryo potentate should blink and scape.
King, all the better he was cobbler once,
He should know, sitting on the throne, how tastes
Life to who sweeps the doorway. But life 's hard,
Occasion rare; you cut probation short,

And, being half-instructed, on the stage
You shuffle through your part as best you can,
And bless your stars, as I do. God takes time.
I like the thought He should have lodged me once
I' the hole, the cave, the hut, the tenement,
The mansion and the palace ; made me learn
The feel o' the first, before I found myself
Loftier i' the last, not more emancipate ;
From first to last of lodging, I was I,
And not at all the place that harboured me.
Do I refuse to follow farther yet
I' the backwardness, repine if tree and flower,
Mountain or streamlet were my dwelling-place
Before I gained enlargement, grew mollusc?
As well account that way for many a thrill
Of kinship, I confess to, with the powers
Called Nature : animate, inanimate,
In parts or in the whole, there 's something there
Man-like that somehow meets the man in me.
My pulse goes altogether with the heart
O' the Persian, that old Xerxes, when he stayed
His march to conquest of the world, a day
I' the desert, for the sake of one superb
Plane-tree which queened it there in solitude :
Giving her neck its necklace, and each arm
Its armlet, suiting soft waist, snowy side,

With cincture and apparel. Yes, I lodged
In those successive tenements; perchance
Taste yet the straitness of them while I stretch
Limb and enjoy new liberty the more.
And some abodes are lost or ruinous;
Some, patched-up and pieced-out, and so transformed
They still accommodate the traveller
His day of lifetime. O you count the links,
Descry no bar of the unbroken man?
Yes,—and who welds a lump of ore, suppose
He likes to make a chain and not a bar,
And reach by link on link, link small, link large,
Out to the due length—why, there 's forethought still
Outside o' the series, forging at one end,
While at the other there 's—no matter what
The kind of critical intelligence
Believing that last link had last but one
For parent, and no link was, first of all,
Fitted to anvil, hammered into shape.
Else, I accept the doctrine, and deduce
This duty, that I recognize mankind,
In all its height and depth and length and breadth.
Mankind i' the main have little wants, not large:
I, being of will and power to help, i' the main,
Mankind, must help the least wants first. My friend,
That is, my foe, without such power and will,

May plausibly concentrate all he wields,
And do his best at helping some large want,
Exceptionally noble cause, that 's seen
Subordinate enough from where I stand.
As he helps, I helped once, when like himself,
Unable to help better, work more wide;
And so would work with heart and hand to-day,
Did only computists confess a fault,
And multiply the single score by five,
Five only, give man's life its hundred years.
Change life, in me shall follow change to match!
Time were then, to work here, there, everywhere,
By turns and try experiment at ease!
Full time to mend as well as mar: why wait
The slow and sober uprise all around
O' the building? Let us run up, right to roof,
Some sudden marvel, piece of perfectness,
And testify what we intend the whole!
Is the world losing patience? "Wait!" say we:
"There 's time: no generation needs to die
Unsolaced; you 've a century in store!"
But, no: I sadly let the voices wing
Their way i' the upper vacancy, nor test
Truth on this solid as I promised once.
Well, and what is there to be sad about?
The world 's the world, life 's life, and nothing else.

'T is part of life, a property to prize,
That those o' the higher sort engaged i' the world,
Should fancy they can change its ill to good,
Wrong to right, ugliness to beauty: find
Enough success in fancy turning fact,
To keep the sanguine kind in countenance
And justify the hope that busies them:
Failure enough,—to who can follow change
Beyond their vision, see new good prove ill
I' the consequence, see blacks and whites of life
Shift square indeed, but leave the chequered face
Unchanged i' the main,—failure enough for such,
To bid ambition keep the whole from change,
As their best service. I hope nought beside.
No, my brave thinkers, whom I recognize,
Gladly, myself the first, as, in a sense,
All that our world 's worth, flower and fruit of man!
Such minds myself award supremacy
Over the common insignificance,
When only Mind 's in question,—Body bows
To quite another government, you know.
Be Kant crowned king o' the castle in the air!
Hans Slouch,—his own, and children's mouths to feed
I' the hovel on the ground,—wants meat, nor chews
"The Critique of Pure Reason" in exchange.
But, now,—suppose I could allow your claims

And quite change life to please you,—would it please?
Would life comport with change and still be life?
Ask, now, a doctor for a remedy:
There 's his prescription. Bid him point you out
Which of the five or six ingredients saves
The sick man. "Such the efficacity?
Then why not dare and do things in one dose
Simple and pure, all virtue, no alloy
Of the idle drop and powder?" What 's his word?
The efficacity, neat, were neutralized:
It wants dispersing and retarding,—nay
Is put upon its mettle, plays its part
Precisely through such hindrance everywhere,
Finds some mysterious give and take i' the case,
Some gain by opposition, he foregoes
Should he unfetter the medicament.
So with this thought of yours that fain would work
Free in the world: it wants just what it finds—
The ignorance, stupidity, the hate,
Envy and malice and uncharitableness
That bar your passage, break the flow of you
Down from those happy heights where many a cloud
Combined to give you birth and bid you be
The royalest of rivers: on you glide
Silverly till you reach the summit-edge,
Then over, on to all that ignorance,

Stupidity, hate, envy, bluffs and blocks,
Posted to fret you into foam and noise.
What of it? Up you mount in minute mist,
And bridge the chasm that crushed your quietude,
A spirit-rainbow, earthborn jewelry
Outsparkling the insipid firmament
Blue above Terni and its orange-trees.
Do not mistake me! You, too, have your rights!
Hans must not burn Kant's house above his head
Because he cannot understand Kant's book:
And still less must Hans' pastor burn Kant's self
Because Kant understands some books too well.
But, justice seen to on this little point,
Answer me, is it manly, is it sage
To stop and struggle with arrangements here
It took so many lives, so much of toil,
To tinker up into efficiency?
Can't you contrive to operate at once,—
Since time is short and art is long,—to show
Your quality i' the world, whate'er you boast,
Without this fractious call on folks to crush
The world together just to set you free,
Admire the capers you will cut perchance,
Nor mind the mischief to your neighbours?

"Age!
Age and experience bring discouragement,"
You taunt me: I maintain the opposite.
Am I discouraged who,—perceiving health,
Strength, beauty, as they tempt the eye of soul,
Are uncombinable with flesh and blood,—
Resolve to let my body live its best,
And leave my soul what better yet may be
Or not be, in this life or afterward?
—In either fortune, wiser than who waits
Till magic art procure a miracle.
In virtue of my very confidence
Mankind ought to outgrow its babyhood,
I prescribe rocking, deprecate rough hands,
While thus the cradle holds it past mistake.
Indeed, my task 's the harder — equable
Sustainment everywhere, all strain, no push—
Whereby friends credit me with indolence,
Apathy, hesitation. "Stand stock-still
If able to move briskly? 'All a-strain'—
So must we compliment your passiveness?
Sound asleep, rather!"

Just the judgment passed
Upon a statue, luckless like myself,
I saw at Rome once! 'T was some artist's whim

To cover all the accessories close
I' the group, and leave you only Laocoön
With neither sons nor serpents to denote
The purpose of his gesture. Then a crowd
Was called to try the question, criticize
Wherefore such energy of legs and arms,
Nay, eyeballs, starting from the socket. One—
I give him leave to write my history—
Only one said "I think the gesture strives
Against some obstacle we cannot see."
All the rest made their minds up. "'T is a yawn
Of sheer fatigue subsiding to repose:
The statue's 'Somnolency' clear enough!"

There, my arch stranger-friend, my audience both
And arbitress, you have one half your wish,
At least: you know the thing I tried to do!
All, so far, to my praise and glory—all
Told as befits the self-apologist,—
Who ever promises a candid sweep
And clearance of those errors miscalled crimes
None knows more, none laments so much as he,
And ever rises from confession, proved
A god whose fault was—trying to be man.
Just so, fair judge,—if I read smile aright—
I condescend to figure in your eyes

As biggest heart and best of Europe's friends,
And hence my failure. God will estimate
Success one day; and, in the mean time—you!

I dare say there 's some fancy of the sort
Frolicking round this final puff I send
To die up yonder in the ceiling-rose,—
Some consolation-stakes, we losers win!
A plague of the return to "I—I—I
Did this, meant that, hoped, feared the other thing!"
Autobiography, adieu! The rest
Shall make amends, be pure blame, history
And falsehood: not the ineffective truth,
But Thiers-and-Victor-Hugo exercise.
Hear what I never was, but might have been
I' the better world where goes tobacco-smoke!
Here lie the dozen volumes of my life:
(Did I say "lie"? the pregnant word will serve).
Cut on to the concluding chapter, though!
Because the little hours begin to strike.
Hurry Thiers-Hugo to the labour's end!

Something like this the unwritten chapter reads.

Exemplify the situation thus!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, being, no dispute,

Absolute mistress, chose the Assembly, first,
To serve her: chose this man, its President
Afterward, to serve also,—specially
To see that folk did service one and all.
And now the proper term of years was out
When the Head-servant must vacate his place,
And nothing lay so patent to the world
As that his fellow-servants one and all
Were—mildly to make mention—knaves or fools,
Each of them with his promise flourished full
I' the face of you by word and impudence,
Or filtered slyly out by nod and wink
And nudge upon your sympathetic rib—
That not one minute more did knave or fool
Mean to keep faith and serve as he had sworn
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, once her Head away.
Why should such swear except to get the chance,
When time should ripen and confusion bloom,
Of putting Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
To the true use of human property—
Restoring souls and bodies, this to Pope,
And that to King, that other to his planned
Perfection of a Share-and-share-alike,
That other still, to Empire absolute
In shape of the Head-servant's very self
Transformed to Master whole and sole? each scheme

Discussible, concede one circumstance—
That each scheme's parent were, beside himself,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, not her serving-man
Sworn to do service in the way she chose
Rather than his way: way superlative,
Only,—by some infatuation,—his
And his and his and everyone's but hers
Who stuck to just the Assembly and the Head.
I make no doubt the Head, too, had his dream
Of doing sudden duty swift and sure
On all that heap of untrustworthiness—
Catching each vaunter of the villany
He meant to perpetrate when time was ripe,
Once the Head-servant fairly out of doors,—
And, caging here a knave and there a fool,
Cry "Mistress of your servants, these and me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau! I, their trusty Head,
Pounce on a pretty scheme concocting here
That 's stopped, extinguished by my vigilance.
Your property is safe again: but mark!
Safe in these hands, not yours, who lavish trust
Too lightly. Leave my hands their charge awhile!
I know your business better than yourself:
Let me alone about it! Some fine day,
Once we are rid of the embarrassment,
You shall look up and see your longings crowned!"

Such fancy might have tempted him be false,
But this man chose truth and was wiser so.
He recognized that for great minds i' the world
There is no trial like the appropriate one
Of leaving little minds their liberty
Of littleness to blunder on through life,
Now, aiming at right ends by foolish means,
Now, at absurd achievement through the aid
Of good and wise endeavour—to acquiesce
In folly's life-long privilege, though with power
To do the little minds the good they need,
Despite themselves, by just abolishing
Their right to play the part and fill the place
I' the scheme of things He schemed who made alike
Great minds and little minds, saw use for each.
Could the orb sweep those puny particles
It just half-lights at distance, hardly leads
I' the leash—sweep out each speck of them from space
They anticize in with their days and nights
And whirlings round and dancings off, forsooth,
And all that fruitless individual life
One cannot lend a beam to but they spoil—
Sweep them into itself and so, one star,
Preponderate henceforth i' the heritage
Of heaven! No! in less senatorial phrase,
The man endured to help, not save outright

The multitude by substituting him
For them, his knowledge, will and way, for God's :
Nor change the world, such as it is, and was
And will be, for some other, suiting all
Except the purpose of the maker. No !
He saw that weakness, wickedness will be,
And therefore should be : that the perfect man
As we account perfection—at most pure
O' the special gold, whate'er the form it take,
Head-work or heart-work, fined and thrice-refined
I' the crucible of life, whereto the powers
Of the refiner, one and all, are flung
To feed the flame, he saw that e'en the block
Such perfect man holds out triumphant, breaks
Into some poisonous ore, gold's opposite,
At the very purest, so compensating
Man's Adversary—what if we believe?—
For earlier stern exclusion of his stuff.
See the sage, with the hunger for the truth,
And see his system that 's all true, except
The one weak place that 's stanchioned by a lie !
The moralist who walks with head erect
I' the crystal clarity of air so long,
Until a stumble, and the man 's one mire !
Philanthropy undoes the social knot
With axe-edge, makes love room 'twixt head and trunk :

Religion—but, enough, the thing 's too clear!
Well, if these sparks break out i' the greenest tree,
Our topmost of performance, yours and mine,
What will be done i' the dry ineptitude
Of ordinary mankind, bark and bole,
All seems ashamed of but their mother-earth?
Therefore throughout Head's term of servitude
He did the appointed service, and forbore
Extraneous action that were duty else,
Done by some other servant, idle now
Or mischievous: no matter, each his own—
Own task, and, in the end, own praise or blame!
He suffered them strut, prate and brag their best,
Squabble at odds on every point save one,
And there shake hands,—agree to trifle time,
Obstruct advance with, each, his cricket-cry
"Wait till the Head be off the shoulders here!
Then comes my King, my Pope, my Autocrat,
My Socialist Republic to her own—
To-wit, that property of only me,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau who conceits herself
Free, forsooth, and expects I keep her so!"
—Nay, suffered when, perceiving with dismay
Head's silence paid no tribute to their noise,
They turned on him. "Dumb menace in that mouth,
Malice in that unstridulosity!

He cannot but intend some stroke of state
Shall signalize his passage into peace
Out of the creaking,—hinder transference
O' the Hohenstielers-Schwangauese to king,
Pope, autocrat, or socialist republic! That 's
Exact the cause his lips unlocked would cry!
Therefore be stirring: brave, beard, bully him!
Dock, by the million, of its friendly joints,
The electoral body short at once! who did,
May do again, and undo us beside.
Wrest from his hands the sword for self-defence,
The right to parry any thrust in play
We peradventure please to meditate!"
And so forth; creak, creak, creak: and ne'er a line
His locked mouth oped the wider, till at last
O' the long degraded and insulting day,
Sudden the clock told it was judgment-time.
Then he addressed himself to speak indeed
To the fools, not knaves: they saw him walk straight down
Each step of the eminence, as he first engaged,
And stand at last o' the level,—all he swore.
"People, and not the people's varletry,
This is the task you set myself and these!
Thus I performed my part of it, and thus
They thwarted me throughout, here, here, and here:

Study each instance! yours the loss, not mine.
What they intend now is demonstrable
As plainly: here 's such man, and here 's such mode
Of making you some other than the thing
You, wisely or unwisely, choose to be,
And only set him up to keep you so.
Do you approve this? Yours the loss, not mine.
Do you condemn it? There 's a remedy.
Take me—who know your mind, and mean your good,
With clearer brain and stouter arm than they,
Or you, or haply anybody else—
And make me master for the moment! Choose
What time, what power you trust me with: I too
Will choose as frankly ere I trust myself
With time and power: they must be adequate
To the end and aim, since mine the loss, with yours,
If means be wanting; once their worth approved,
Grant them, and I shall forthwith operate—
Ponder it well!—to the extremest stretch
O' the power you trust me: if with unsuccess,
God wills it, and there 's nobody to blame."

Whereon the people answered with a shout
"The trusty one! no tricksters any more!"
How could they other? He was in his place.

What followed? Just what he foresaw, what proved
The soundness of both judgments,—his, o' the knaves
And fools, each trickster with his dupe,—and theirs,
The people's, in what head and arm could help.
There was uprising, masks dropped, flags unfurled,
Weapons outflourished in the wind, my faith!
Heavily did he let his fist fall plumb
On each perturber of the public peace,
No matter whose the wagging head it broke—
From bald-pate craft and greed and impudence
Of night-hawk at first chance to prowl and prey
For glory and a little gain beside,
Passing for eagle in the dusk of the age,—
To florid head-top, foamy patriotism
And tribunitial daring, breast laid bare
Thro' confidence in rectitude, with hand
On private pistol in the pocket: these
And all the dupes of these, who lent themselves
As dust and feather do, to help offence
O' the wind that whirls them at you, then subsides
In safety somewhere, leaving filth afloat,
Annoyance you may brush from eyes and beard,—
These he stopped: bade the wind's spite howl or whine
Its worst outside the building, wind conceives
Meant to be pulled together and become
Its natural playground so. What foolishness

Of dust or feather proved importunate
And fell 'twixt thumb and finger, found them gripe
To detriment of bulk and buoyancy.
Then followed silence and submission. Next,
The inevitable comment came on work
And work's cost: he was censured as profuse
Of human life and liberty: too swift
And thorough his procedure, who had lagged
At the outset, lost the opportunity
Through timid scruples as to right and wrong.
"There 's no such certain mark of a small mind"
(So did Sagacity explain the fault)
"As when it needs must square away and sink
To its own small dimensions, private scale
Of right and wrong,—humanity i' the large,
The right and wrong of the universe, forsooth!
This man addressed himself to guard and guide
Hohenstiel-Schwangau. When the case demands
He frustrate villany in the egg, unhatched,
With easy stamp and minimum of pang
E'en to the punished reptile, 'There's my oath
Restrains my foot,' objects our guide and guard,
'I must leave guardianship and guidance now:
Rather than stretch one handbreadth of the law,
I am bound to see it break from end to end.
First show me death i' the body politic:

Then prescribe pill and potion, what may please
Hohenstiel-Schwangau! all is for her sake:
'T was she ordained my service should be so.
What if the event demonstrate her unwise,
If she unwill the thing she willed before?
I hold to the letter and obey the bond
And leave her to perdition loyally.'
Whence followed thrice the expenditure we blame
Of human life and liberty: for want
O' the by-blow, came deliberate butcher's-work!"
"Elsewhere go carry your complaint!" bade he.
"Least, largest, there 's one law for all the minds,
Here or above: be true at any price!
'T is just o' the great scale, that such happy stroke
Of falsehood would be found a failure. Truth
Still stands unshaken at her base by me,
Reigns paramount i' the world, for the large good
O' the long late generations,—I and you
Forgotten like this buried foolishness!
Not so the good I rooted in its grave."

This is why he refused to break his oath,
Rather appealed to the people, gained the power
To act as he thought best, then used it, once
For all, no matter what the consequence
To knaves and fools. As thus began his sway,

So, through its twenty years, one rule of right
Sufficed him: govern for the many first,
The poor mean multitude, all mouths and eyes:
Bid the few, better favoured in the brain,
Be patient nor presume on privilege,
Help him or else be quiet,—never crave
That he help them,—increase, forsooth, the gulf
Yawning so terribly 'twixt mind and mind
I' the world here, which his purpose was to block
At bottom, were it by an inch, and bridge,
If by a filament, no more, at top.
Equalize things a little! And the way
He took to work that purpose out, was plain
Enough to intellect and honesty
And—superstition, style it if you please,
So long as you allow there was no lack
O' the quality imperative in man—
Reverence. You see deeper? thus saw he,
And by the light he saw, must walk: how else
Was he to do his part? a man's, with might
And main, and not a faintest touch of fear,
Sure he was in the hand of God who comes
Before and after, with a work to do
Which no man helps nor hinders. Thus the man,—
So timid when the business was to touch
The uncertain order of humanity,

Imperil, for a problematic cure
Of grievance on the surface, any good
I' the deep of things, dim yet discernible—
This same man, so irresolute before,
Show him a true excrescence to cut sheer,
A devil's-graft on God's foundation-stock,
Then—no complaint of indecision more!
He wrenched out the whole canker, root and branch,
Deaf to who cried that earth would tumble in
At its four corners if he touched a twig.
Witness that lie of lies, arch-infamy,
When the Republic, with her life involved
In just this law—"Each people rules itself
Its own way, not as any stranger please"—
Turned, and for first proof she was living, bade
Hohenstiel-Schwangau fasten on the throat
Of the first neighbour that claimed benefit
O' the law herself established: "Hohenstiel
For Hohenstielers! Rome, by parity
Of reasoning, for Romans? That 's a jest
Wants proper treatment,—lancet-puncture suits
The proud flesh: Rome ape Hohenstiel forsooth!"
And so the siege and slaughter and success
Whereof we nothing doubt that Hohenstiel
Will have to pay the price, in God's good time
Which does not always fall on Saturday

When the world looks for wages. Anyhow,
He found this infamy triumphant. Well:
Sagacity suggested, make this speech!
"The work was none of mine: suppose wrong wait,
Stand over for redressing? Mine for me,
My predecessors' work on their own head!
Meantime there's plain advantage, should we leave
Things as we find them. Keep Rome manacled
Hand and foot: no fear of unruliness!
Her foes consent to even seem our friends
So long, no longer. Then, there's glory got
By boldness and bravado to the world:
The disconcerted world must grin and bear
The old saucy writing, 'Grunt thereat who may,
So shall things be, for such my pleasure is—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's.' How that reads in Rome
I' the Capitol where Brennus broke his pate,
And lends a flourish to our journalists!"
Only, it was nor read nor flourished of,
Since, not a moment did such glory stay
Excision of the canker! Out it came,
Root and branch, with much roaring, and some blood,
And plentiful abuse of him from friend
And foe. Who cared? Not Nature who assuaged
The pain and set the patient on his legs
Promptly: the better! had it been the worse,

'T is Nature you must try conclusions with,
Not he, since nursing canker kills the sick
For certain, while to cut may cure, at least.
"Ah," groaned a second time Sagacity,
"Again the little mind, precipitate,
Rash, rude, when even in the right, as here!
The great mind knows the power of gentleness,
Only tries force because persuasion fails.
Had this man, by prelusive trumpet-blast,
Signified 'Truth and Justice mean to come,
Nay, fast approach your threshold! Ere they knock,
See that the house be set in order, swept
And garnished, windows shut, and doors thrown wide!
The free State comes to visit the free Church:
Receive her! or . . . or . . . never mind what else!'
Thus moral suasion heralding brute force,
How had he seen the old abuses die,
And new life kindle here, there, everywhere,
Roused simply by that mild yet potent spell—
Beyond or beat of drum or stroke of sword—
Public opinion!"

"How, indeed?" he asked,
"When all to see, after some twenty years,
Were your own fool-face waiting for the sight,
Faced by as wide a grin from ear to ear

O' the knaves who, while the fools were waiting, worked—
Broke yet another generation's heart—
Twenty years' respite helping! Teach your nurse
'Compliance with, before you suck, the teat!'
Find what that means, and meanwhile hold your tongue!"

Whereof the war came which he knew must be.

Now, this had proved the dry-rot of the race
He ruled o'er, that, i' the old day, when was need
They fought for their own liberty and life,
Well did they fight, none better: whence, such love
Of fighting somehow still for fighting's sake
Against no matter whose the liberty
And life, so long as self-conceit should crow
And clap the wing, while justice sheathed her claw,—
That what had been the glory of the world
When thereby came the world's good, grew its plague
Now that the champion-armour, donned to dare
The dragon once, was clattered up and down
Highway and by-path of the world at peace,
Merely to mask marauding, or for sake
O' the shine and rattle that apprized the fields
Hohenstiel-Schwangau was a fighter yet,
And would be, till the weary world suppressed

Her peccant humours out of fashion now.
Accordingly the world spoke plain at last,
Promised to punish who next played with fire.

So, at his advent, such discomfiture
Taking its true shape of beneficence,
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, half-sad and part-wise,
Sat: if with wistful eye reverting oft
To each pet weapon, rusty on its peg,
Yet, with a sigh of satisfaction too
That, peacefulness become the law, herself
Got the due share of godsends in its train,
Cried shame and took advantage quietly.
Still, so the dry-rot had been nursed into
Blood, bones and marrow, that, from worst to best,
All,—clearest brains and soundest hearts save here,—
All had this lie acceptable for law
Plain as the sun at noonday—"War is best,
Peace is worst; peace we only tolerate
As needful preparation for new war:
War may be for whatever end we will—
Peace only as the proper help thereto.
Such is the law of right and wrong for us
Hohenstiel-Schwangau: for the other world,
As naturally, quite another law.
Are we content? The world is satisfied.

Discontent? Then the world must give us leave
To strike right, left, and exercise our arm
Torpid of late through overmuch repose,
And show its strength is still superlative
At somebody's expense in life or limb:
Which done,—let peace succeed and last a year!"
Such devil's-doctrine so was judged God's law,
We say, when this man stepped upon the stage,
That it had seemed a venial fault at most
Had he once more obeyed Sagacity.
"You come i' the happy interval of peace,
The favourable weariness from war:
Prolong it! artfully, as if intent
On ending peace as soon as possible.
Quietly so increase the sweets of ease
And safety, so employ the multitude,
Put hod and trowel so in idle hands,
So stuff and stop up wagging jaws with bread,
That selfishness shall surreptitiously
Do wisdom's office, whisper in the ear
Of Hohenstiel-Schwangau, there 's a pleasant feel
In being gently forced down, pinioned fast
To the easy arm-chair by the pleading arms
O' the world beseeching her to there abide
Content with all the harm done hitherto,
And let herself be petted in return,

Free to re-wage, in speech and prose and verse,
The old unjust wars, nay—in verse and prose
And speech,—to vaunt new victories shall prove
A plague o' the future,—so that words suffice
For present comfort, and no deeds denote
That—tired of illimitable line on line
Of boulevard-building, tired o' the theatre
With the tuneful thousand in their thrones above,
For glory of the male intelligence,
And Nakedness in her due niche below,
For illustration of the female use—
That she, 'twixt yawn and sigh, prepares to slip
Out of the arm-chair, wants fresh blood again
From over the boundary, to colour-up
The sheeny sameness, keep the world aware
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's arm needs exercise
Despite the petting of the universe!
Come, you 're a city-builder: what 's the way
Wisdom takes when time needs that she entice
Some fierce tribe, castled on the mountain-peak,
Into the quiet and amenity
O' the meadow-land below? By crying 'Done
With fight now, down with fortress?' Rather—'Dare
On, dare ever, not a stone displace!'
Cries Wisdom: 'Cradle of our ancestors,
Be bulwark, give our children safety still!

Who of our children please may stoop and taste
O' the valley-fatness, unafraid,—for why?
At first alarm they have thy mother-ribs
To run upon for refuge: foes forget
Scarcely that Terror on her vantage-coign,
Couchant supreme among the powers of air,
Watches—prepared to pounce—the country wide!'
Meanwhile the encouraged valley holds its own,
From the first hut's adventure in descent,
Half home, half hiding place,—to dome and spire
Befitting the assured metropolis:
Nor means offence to the fort which caps the crag,
All undismantled of a turret-stone,
And bears the banner-pole that creaks at times
Embarrassed by the old emblazonment,
When festal days are to commemorate:
Otherwise left untenanted, no doubt,
Since, never fear, our myriads from below
Would rush, if needs were, man the walls again,
Renew the exploits of the earlier time
At moment's notice! But till notice sound,
Inhabit we in ease and opulence!'
And so, till one day thus a notice sounds,
Not trumpeted, but in a whisper-gust
Fitfully playing through mute city streets
At midnight weary of day's feast and game—

'Friends, your famed fort 's a ruin past repair!
Its use is—to proclaim it had a use
Obsolete long since. Climb and study there
How to paint barbican and battlement
I' the scenes of our new theatre! We fight
Now—by forbidding neighbours to sell steel
Or buy wine, not by blowing out their brains!
Moreover, while we let time sap the strength
O' the walls omnipotent in menace once,
Neighbours would seem to have prepared surprise—
Run up defences in a mushroom-growth,
For all the world like what we boasted: brief—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau's policy is peace!'"

Ay, so Sagacity advised him filch
Folly from fools: handsomely substitute
The dagger o' lath, while gay they sang and danced,
For that long dangerous sword they liked to feel,
Even at feast-time, clink and make friends start.
No! he said "Hear the truth, and bear the truth,
And bring the truth to bear on all you are
And do, assured that only good comes thence
Whate'er the shape good take! While I have rule,
Understand!—war for war's sake, war for sake
O' the good war gets you as war's sole excuse,
Is damnable and damned shall be. You want

Glory? Why so do I, and so does God.
Where is it found,—in this paraded shame,—
One particle of glory? Once you warred
For liberty against the world, and won:
There was the glory. Now, you fain would war
Because the neighbour prospers overmuch,—
Because there has been silence half-an-hour,
Like Heaven on earth, without a cannon-shot
Announcing Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
Are minded to disturb the jubilee,—
Because the loud tradition echoes faint,
And who knows but posterity may doubt
If the great deeds were ever done at all,
Much less believe, were such to do again,
So the event would follow: therefore, prove
The old power, at the expense of somebody!
Oh Glory,—gilded bubble, bard and sage
So nickname rightly,—would thy dance endure
One moment, would thy vaunting make believe
Only one eye thy ball was solid gold,
Hadst thou less breath to buoy thy vacancy
Than a whole multitude expends in praise,
Less range for roaming than from head to head
Of a whole people? Flit, fall, fly again,
Only, fix never where the resolute hand
May prick thee, prove the glassy lie thou art!

Give me real intellect to reason with,
No multitude, no entity that apes
One wise man, being but a million fools!
How and whence wishest glory, thou wise one?
Wouldst get it,—didst thyself guide Providence,—
By stinting of his due each neighbour round
In strength and knowledge and dexterity
So as to have thy littleness grow large
By all those somethings once, turned nothings now,
As children make a molehill mountainous
By scooping out a trench around their pile,
And saving so the mudwork from approach?
Quite otherwise the cheery game of life,
True yet mimetic warfare, whereby man
Does his best with his utmost, and so ends
A victor most of all in fair defeat.
Who thinks,—would he have no one think beside?
Who knows, who does,—save his must learning die
And action cease? Why, so our giant proves
No better than a dwarf, once rivalry
Prostrate around him. Let the whole race stand
For him to try conclusions fairly with!
Show me the great man would engage his peer
Rather by grinning 'Cheat, thy gold is brass!'
Than granting 'Perfect piece of purest ore!
Still, is it less good mintage, this of mine?'

Well, and these right and sound results of soul
I' the strong and healthy one wise man,—shall such
Be vainly sought for, scornfully renounced
I' the multitude that make the entity—
The people?—to what purpose, if no less,
In power and purity of soul, below
The reach of the unit than, by multiplied
Might of the body, vulgarized the more,
Above, in thick and threefold brutishness?
See! you accept such one wise man, myself:
Wiser or less wise, still I operate
From my own stock of wisdom, nor exact
Of other sort of natures you admire,
That whoso rhymes a sonnet pays a tax,
Who paints a landscape dips brush at his cost,
Who scores a septett true for strings and wind
Mulcted must be—else how should I impose
Properly, attitudinize aright,
Did such conflicting claims as these divert
Hohenstiel-Schwangau from observing me?
Therefore, what I find facile, you be sure,
With effort or without it, you shall dare—
You, I aspire to make my better self
And truly the Great Nation. No more war
For war's sake, then! and,—seeing, wickedness
Springs out of folly,—no more foolish dread

O' the neighbour waxing too inordinate
A rival, through his gain of wealth and ease!
What?—keep me patient, Powers!—the people here,
Earth presses to her heart, nor owns a pride
Above her pride i' the race all flame and air
And aspiration to the boundless Great,
The incommensurably Beautiful—
Whose very falterings groundward come of flight
Urged by a pinion all too passionate
For heaven and what it holds of gloom and glow:
Bravest of thinkers, bravest of the brave
Doers, exalt in Science, rapturous
In Art, the—more than all—magnetic race
To fascinate their fellows, mould mankind
Hohenstiel-Schwangau-fashion,—these, what?—these
Will have to abdicate their primacy
Should such a nation sell them steel untaxed,
And such another take itself, on hire
For the natural sen'night, somebody for lord
Unpatronized by me whose back was turned?
Or such another yet would fain build bridge,
Lay rail, drive tunnel, busy its poor self
With its appropriate fancy: so there 's—flash—
Hohenstiel-Schwangau up in arms at once!
Genius has somewhat of the infantine:
But of the childish, not a touch nor taint

Except through self-will, which, being foolishness,
Is certain, soon or late, of punishment
Which Providence avert!—and that it may
Avert what both of us would so deserve,
No foolish dread o' the neighbour, I enjoin!
By consequence, no wicked war with him,
While I rule!

Does that mean—no war at all
When just the wickedness I here proscribe
Comes, haply, from the neighbour? Does my speech
Precede the praying that you beat the sword
To ploughshare, and the spear to pruning-hook,
And sit down henceforth under your own vine
And fig-tree through the sleepy summer month,
Letting what hurly-burly please explode
On the other side the mountain-frontier? No,
Beloved! I foresee and I announce
Necessity of warfare in one case,
For one cause: one way, I bid broach the blood
O' the world. For truth and right, and only right
And truth,—right, truth, on the absolute scale of God,
No pettiness of man's admeasurement,—
In such case only, and for such one cause,
Fight your hearts out, whatever fate betide
Hands energetic to the uttermost!

Lie not! Endure no lie which needs your heart
And hand to push it out of mankind's path—
No lie that lets the natural forces work
Too long ere lay it plain and pulverized—
Seeing man's life lasts only twenty years!
And such a lie, before both man and God,
Proving, at this time present, Austria's rule
O'er Italy,—for Austria's sake the first,
Italy's next, and our sake last of all,
Come with me and deliver Italy!
Smite hip and thigh until the oppressor leave
Free from the Adriatic to the Alps
The oppressed one! We were they who laid her low
In the old bad day when Villany braved Truth
And Right, and laughed 'Henceforward, God deposed,
Satan we set to rule for evermore
I' the world!'—whereof to stop the consequence,
And for atonement of false glory there
Gaped at and gabbled over by the world,
I purpose to get God enthroned again
For what the world will gird at as sheer shame
I' the cost of blood and treasure. 'All for nought—
Not even, say, some patch of province, splice
O' the frontier?—some snug honorarium-fee
Shut into glove and pocketed apace?'
(Questions Sagacity) 'in deference

To the natural susceptibility
Of folks at home, unwitting of that pitch
You soar to, and misdoubting if Truth, Right
And the other such augustnesses repay
Expenditure in coin o' the realm,—but prompt
To recognize the cession of Savoy
And Nice as marketable value!' No,
Sagacity, go preach to Metternich,
And, sermon ended, stay where he resides!
Hohenstiel-Schwangau, you and I must march
The other road! war for the hate of war,
Not love, this once!" So Italy was free.

What else noteworthy and commendable
I' the man's career?—that he was resolute
No trepidation, much less treachery
On his part, should imperil from its poise
The ball o' the world, heaved up at such expense
Of pains so far, and ready to rebound,
Let but a finger maladroitly fall,
Under pretence of making fast and sure
The inch gained by late volubility,
And run itself back to the ancient rest
At foot o' the mountain. Thus he ruled, gave proof
The world had gained a point, progressive so,
By choice, this time, as will and power concurred,

O' the fittest man to rule; not chance of birth,
Or such-like dice-throw. Oft Sagacity
Was at his ear: "Confirm this clear advance,
Support this wise procedure! You, elect
O' the people, mean to justify their choice
And out-king all the kingly imbeciles;
But that 's just half the enterprise: remains
You find them a successor like yourself,
In head and heart and eye and hand and aim,
Or all done 's undone; and whom hope to mould
So like you as the pupil Nature sends,
The son and heir's completeness which you lack?
Lack it no longer! Wed the pick o' the world,
Where'er you think you find it. Should she be
A queen,—tell Hohenstielers-Schwangauese
'So do the old enthroned decrepitudes
Acknowledge, in the rotten hearts of them,
Their knell is knolled, they hasten to make peace
With the new order, recognize in me
Your right to constitute what king you will,
Cringe therefore crown in hand and bride on arm,
To both of us: we triumph, I suppose!'
Is it the other sort of rank?—bright eye,
Soft smile, and so forth, all her queenly boast?
Undaunted the exordium—'I, the man
O' the people, with the people mate myself:

So stand, so fall. Kings, keep your crowns and brides!
Our progeny (if Providence agree)
Shall live to tread the baubles underfoot
And bid the scarecrows consort with their kin.
For son, as for his sire, be the free wife
In the free state!'

That is, Sagacity
Would prop up one more lie, the most of all
Pernicious fancy that the son and heir
Receives the genius from the sire, himself
Transmits as surely,—ask experience else!
Which answers,—never was so plain a truth
As that God drops his seed of heavenly flame
Just where He wills on earth: sometimes where man
Seems to tempt—such the accumulated store
Of faculties—one spark to fire the heap;
Sometimes where, fire-ball-like, it falls upon
The naked unpreparedness of rock,
Burns, beaconing the nations through their night.
Faculties, fuel for the flame? All helps
Come, ought to come, or come not, crossed by chance,
From culture and transmission. What 's your want
I' the son and heir? Sympathy, aptitude,
Teachableness, the fuel for the flame?
You 'll have them for your pains: but the flame's self,

The novel thought of God shall light the world?
No, poet, though your offspring rhyme and chime
I' the cradle,—painter, no, for all your pet
Draws his first eye, beats Salvatore's boy,—
And thrice no, statesman, should your progeny
Tie bib and tucker with no tape but red,
And make a foolscap-kite of protocols!
Critic and copyist and bureaucrat
To heart's content! The seed o' the apple-tree
Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:
'T is the great gardener grafts the excellence
On wildings where he will.

"How plain I view,
Across those misty years 'twixt me and Rome"—
(Such the man's answer to Sagacity)
"The little wayside temple, half-way down
To a mild river that makes oxen white
Miraculously, un-mouse-colours skin,
Or so the Roman country people dream!
I view that sweet small shrub-embedded shrine
On the declivity, was sacred once
To a transmuting Genius of the land,
Could touch and turn its dunnest natures bright,
—Since Italy means the Land of the Ox, we know.
Well, how was it the due succession fell

From priest to priest who ministered i' the cool
Calm fane o' the Clitumnian god? The sire
Brought forth a son and sacerdotal sprout,
Endowed instinctively with good and grace
To suit the gliding gentleness below—
Did he? Tradition tells another tale.
Each priest obtained his predecessor's staff,
Robe, fillet and insignia, blamelessly,
By springing out of ambush, soon or late,
And slaying him: the initiative rite
Simply was murder, save that murder took,
I' the case, another and religious name.
So it was once, is now, shall ever be
With genius and its priesthood in this world:
The new power slays the old—but handsomely.
There he lies, not diminished by an inch
Of stature that he graced the altar with,
Though somebody of other bulk and build
Cries 'What a goodly personage lies here
Reddening the water where the bulrush roots!
May I conduct the service in his place,
Decently and in order, as did he,
And, as he did not, keep a wary watch
When meditating 'neath yon willow shade!'
Find out your best man, sure the son of him
Will prove best man again, and, better still

Somehow than best, the grandson-prodigy!
You think the world would last another day
Did we so make us masters of the trick
Whereby the works go, we could pre-arrange
Their play and reach perfection when we please?
Depend on it, the change and the surprise
Are part o' the plan: 't is we wish steadiness;
Nature prefers a motion by unrest,
Advancement through this force which jostles that.
And so, since much remains i' the world to see,
Here 's the world still, affording God the sight."
Thus did the man refute Sagacity
Ever at this old whisper in his ear:
"Here are you picked out, by a miracle,
And placed conspicuously enough, folks say
And you believe, by Providence outright
Taking a new way—nor without success—
To put the world upon its mettle: good!
But Fortune alternates with Providence;
Resource is soon exhausted. Never count
On such a happy hit occurring twice!
Try the old method next time!"

"Old enough,"
(At whisper in his ear, the laugh outbroke)
"And mode the most discredited of all,

By just the men and women who make boast
They are kings and queens thereby! Mere self-
defence
Should teach them, on one chapter of the law
Must be no sort of trifling—chastity:
They stand or fall, as their progenitors
Were chaste or unchaste. Now, run eye around
My crowned acquaintance, give each life its look
And no more,—why, you 'd think each life was led
Purposely for example of what pains
Who leads it took to cure the prejudice,
And prove there 's nothing so unproveable
As who is who, what son of what a sire,
And,—inferentially,—how faint the chance
That the next generation needs to fear
Another fool o' the selfsame type as he
Happily regnant now by right divine
And luck o' the pillow! No: select your lord
By the direct employment of your brains
As best you may,—bad as the blunder prove,
A far worse evil stank beneath the sun
When some legitimate blockhead managed so
Matters that high time was to interfere,
Though interference came from hell itself
And not the blind mad miserable mob
Happily ruled so long by pillow-luck

And divine right,—by lies in short, not truth.
And meanwhile use the allotted minute . . .

One,—
Two, three, four, five—yes, five the *pendule* warns!
Eh? Why, this wild work wanders past all bound
And bearing! Exile, Leicester-square, the life
I' the old gay miserable time, rehearsed,
Tried on again like cast clothes, still to serve
At a pinch, perhaps? "Who 's who?" was aptly asked,
Since certainly I am not I! since when?
Where is the bud-mouthed arbitress? A nod
Out-Homering Homer! Stay—there flits the clue
I fain would find the end of! Yes,—"Meanwhile,
Use the allotted minute!" Well, you see,
(Veracious and imaginary Thiers,
Who map out thus the life I might have led,
But did not,—all the worse for earth and me—
Doff spectacles, wipe pen, shut book, decamp!)
You see 't is easy in heroics! Plain
Pedestrian speech shall help me perorate.
Ah, if one had no need to use the tongue!
How obvious and how easy 't is to talk
Inside the soul, a ghostly dialogue—
Instincts with guesses,—instinct, guess, again
With dubious knowledge, half-experience: each

And all the interlocutors alike
Subordinating,—as decorum bids,
Oh, never fear! but still decisively,—
Claims from without that take too high a tone,
—(" God wills this, man wants that, the dignity
Prescribed a prince would wish the other thing ")—
Putting them back to insignificance
Beside one intimatest fact—myself
Am first to be considered, since I live
Twenty years longer and then end, perhaps!
But, where one ceases to soliloquize,
Somehow the motives, that did well enough
I' the darkness, when you bring them into light
Are found, like those famed cave-fish, to lack eye
And organ for the upper magnitudes.
The other common creatures, of less fine
Existence, that acknowledge earth and heaven,
Have it their own way in the argument.
Yes, forced to speak, one stoops to say—one's aim
Was—what it peradventure should have been:
To renovate a people, mend or end
That bane come of a blessing meant the world—
Inordinate culture of the sense made quick
By soul,—the lust o' the flesh, lust of the eye,
And pride of life,—and, consequent on these,
The worship of that prince o' the power o' the air

Who paints the cloud and fills the emptiness
And bids his votaries, famishing for truth,
Feed on a lie.

Alack, one lies oneself
Even in the stating that one's end was truth,
Truth only, if one states as much in words!
Give me the inner chamber of the soul
For obvious easy argument! 't is there
One pits the silent truth against a lie—
Truth which breaks shell a careless simple bird,
Nor wants a gorget nor a beak filed fine,
Steel spurs, and the whole armoury o' the tongue,
To equalize the odds. But, do your best,
Words have to come: and somehow words deflect
As the best cannon ever rifled will.

"Deflect" indeed! nor merely words from thoughts
But names from facts: "Clitumnus" did I say?
As if it had been his ox-whitening wave
Whereby folk practised that grim cult of old--
The murder of their temple's priest by who
Would qualify for his succession. Sure—
Nemi was the true lake's style. Dream had need
Of the ox-whitening piece of prettiness
And so confused names, well known once awake.

So, i' the Residenz yet, not Leicester-square,
Alone,—no such congenial intercourse!—
My reverie concludes, as dreaming should,
With daybreak: nothing done and over yet,
Except cigars! The adventure thus may be,
Or never needs to be at all: who knows?
My Cousin-Duke, perhaps, at whose hard head
—Is it, now—is this letter to be launched,
The sight of whose grey oblong, whose grim seal,
Set all these fancies floating for an hour?

Twenty years are good gain, come what come will!
Double or quits! The letter goes! Or stays?

FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

DONE ELVIRE.

Vous plaît-il, don Juan, nous éclaircir ces beaux mystères?

DON JUAN.

Madame, à vous dire la vérité . . .

DONE ELVIRE.

Ah! que vous savez mal vous défendre pour un homme de cour, et qui doit être accoutumé à ces sortes de choses! J'ai pitié de vous voir la confusion que vous avez. Que ne vous armez-vous le front d'une noble effronterie? Que ne me jurez-vous que vous êtes toujours dans les mêmes sentimens pour moi, que vous m'aimez toujours avec une ardeur sans égale, et que rien n'est capable de vous détacher de moi que la mort?

MOLIÈRE, *Don Juan*, acte i. sc. 3.

DONNA ELVIRA.

Don Juan, might you please to help one give a guess,
Hold up a candle, clear this fine mysteriousness?

DON JUAN.

Madam, if needs I must declare the truth,—in short . . .

DONNA ELVIRA.

Fie, for a man of mode, accustomed at the court
To such a style of thing, how awkwardly my lord
Attempts defence! You move compassion, that's the word—
Dumb-foundered and chap-fallen! Why don't you arm your brow
With noble impudence? Why don't you swear and vow
No sort of change is come to any sentiment
You ever had for me? Affection holds the bent,
You love me now as erst, with passion that makes pale
All ardour else: nor aught in nature can avail
To separate us two, save what, in stopping breath,
May peradventure stop devotion likewise—death!

PROLOGUE

AMPHIBIAN.

I.

The fancy I had to-day,
  Fancy which turned a fear!
I swam far out in the bay,
  Since waves laughed warm and clear.

II.

I lay and looked at the sun,
  The noon-sun looked at me:
Between us two, no one
  Live creature, that I could see.

III.

Yes! There came floating by
  Me, who lay floating too.
Such a strange butterfly!
  Creature as dear as new:

IV.

Because the membraned wings
So wonderful, so wide,
So sun-suffused, were things
Like soul and nought beside.

V.

A handbreadth over head!
All of the sea my own,
It owned the sky instead;
Both of us were alone.

VI.

I never shall join its flight,
For, nought buoys flesh in air.
If it touch the sea—good night!
Death sure and swift waits there.

VII.

Can the insect feel the better
For watching the uncouth play
Of limbs that slip the fetter,
Pretend as they were not clay?

VIII.

Undoubtedly I rejoice
That the air comports so well
With a creature which had the choice
Of the land once. Who can tell?

IX.

What if a certain soul
Which early slipped its sheath,
And has for its home the whole
Of heaven, thus look beneath,

X.

Thus watch one who, in the world,
Both lives and likes life's way,
Nor wishes the wings unfurled
That sleep in the worm, they say?

XI.

But sometimes when the weather
Is blue, and warm waves tempt
To free oneself of tether,
And try a life exempt

XII.

From worldly noise and dust,
In the sphere which overbrims
With passion and thought,—why, just
Unable to fly, one swims!

XIII.

By passion and thought upborne,
One smiles to oneself—"They fare
Scarce better, they need not scorn
Our sea, who live in the air!"

XIV.

Emancipate through passion
And thought, with sea for sky,
We substitute, in a fashion,
For heaven—poetry:

XV.

Which sea, to all intent,
Gives flesh such noon-disport
As a finer element
Affords the spirit-sort.

XVI.

Whatever they are, we seem:
Imagine the thing they know;
All deeds they do, we dream;
Can heaven be else but so?

XVII.

And meantime, yonder streak
Meets the horizon's verge;
That is the land, to seek
If we tire or dread the surge:

XVIII.

Land the solid and safe—
To welcome again (confess!)
When, high and dry, we chafe
The body, and don the dress.

XIX.

Does she look, pity, wonder
At one who mimics flight,
Swims—heaven above, sea under,
Yet always earth in sight?

FIFINE AT THE FAIR.

1872.

I.

O TRIP and skip, Elvire! Link arm in arm with me!
Like husband and like wife, together let us see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

Now, who supposed the night would play us such a
prank?
—That what was raw and brown, rough pole and shaven
plank?
Mere bit of hoarding, half by trestle propped, half tub,
Would flaunt it forth as brisk as butterfly from grub?
This comes of sun and air, of Autumn afternoon,
And Pornic and Saint Gille, whose feast affords the boon—

This scaffold turned parterre, this flower-bed in full blow,
Bateleurs, baladines! We shall not miss the show!
They pace and promenade; they presently will dance:
What good were else i' the drum and fife? O pleasant land of France!

III.

Who saw them make their entry? At wink of eve, be sure!
They love to steal a march, nor lightly risk the lure.
They keep their treasure hid, nor stale (improvident)
Before the time is ripe, each wonder of their tent—
Yon six-legged sheep, to wit, and he who beats a gong,
Lifts cap and waves salute, exhilarates the throng—
Their ape of many years and much adventure, grim
And grey with pitying fools who find a joke in him.
Or, best, the human beauty, Mimi, Toinette, Fifine,
Tricot fines down if fat, padding plumps up if lean,
Ere, shedding petticoat, modesty, and such toys,
They bounce forth, squalid girls transformed to gamesome boys.

IV.

No, no, thrice, Pornic, no! Perpend the authentic tale!
'T was not for every Gawain to gaze upon the Grail!

But whoso went his rounds, when flew bat, flitted midge,
Might hear across the dusk,—where both roads join the
bridge,
Hard by the little port,—creak a slow caravan,
A chimneyed house on wheels; so shyly-sheathed, began
To broaden out the bud which, bursting unaware,
Now takes away our breath, queen-tulip of the Fair!

v.

Yet morning promised much: for, pitched and slung
and reared
On terrace 'neath the tower, 'twixt tree and tree appeared
An airy structure; how the pennon from its dome,
Frenetic to be free, makes one red stretch for home!
The home far and away, the distance where lives joy,
The cure, at once and ever, of world and world's annoy;
Since, what lolls full in front, a furlong from the booth,
But ocean-idleness, sky-blue and millpond-smooth?

vi.

Frenetic to be free! And, do you know, there beats
Something within my breast, as sensitive?—repeats
The fever of the flag? My heart makes just the same
Passionate stretch, fires up for lawlessness, lays claim
To share the life they lead: losels, who have and use
The hour what way they will,—applaud them or abuse

Society, whereof myself am at the beck,
Whose call obey, and stoop to burden stiffest neck!

VII.

Why is it that whene'er a faithful few combine
To cast allegiance off, play truant, nor repine,
Agree to bear the worst, forego the best in store
For us who, left behind, do duty as of yore,—
Why is it that, disgraced, they seem to relish life the more?
—Seem as they said "We know a secret passing praise
Or blame of such as you! Remain! we go our ways
With something you o'erlooked, forgot or chose to sweep
Clean out of door: our pearl picked from your rubbish-heap.
You care not for your loss, we calculate our gain.
All's right. Are you content? Why, so let things remain!
To the wood then, to the wild: free life, full liberty!"
And when they rendezvous beneath the inclement sky,
House by the hedge, reduced to brute-companionship,
—Misguided ones who gave society the slip,
And find too late how boon a parent they despised,
What ministration spurned, how sweet and civilized—
Then, left alone at last with self-sought wretchedness,
No interloper else!—why is it, can we guess?—

At somebody's expense, goes up so frank a laugh?
As though they held the corn, and left us only chaff
From garners crammed and closed. And we indeed are clever
If we get grain as good, by thrashing straw for ever!

VIII.

Still, truants as they are and purpose yet to be,
That nowise needs forbid they venture—as you see—
To cross confine, approach the once familiar roof
O' the kindly race their flight estranged: stand half aloof,
Sidle half up, press near, and proffer wares for sale
—In their phrase—make, in ours, white levy of black mail.
They, of the wild, require some touch of us the tame,
Since clothing, meat and drink, mean money all the same.

IX.

If hunger, proverbs say, allures the wolf from wood,
Much more the bird must dare a dash at something good:
Must snatch up, bear away in beak, the trifle-treasure
To wood and wild, and then—O how enjoy at leisure!
Was never tree-built nest, you climbed and took, of bird
(Rare city-visitant, talked of, scarce seen or heard),

But, when you would dissect the structure, piece by piece,
You found, enwreathed amid the country-product—fleece
And feather, thistle-fluffs and bearded windlestraws—
Some shred of foreign silk, unravelling of gauze,
Bit, may be, of brocade, mid fur and blow-bell-down:
Filched plainly from mankind, dear tribute paid by town,
Which proved how oft the bird had plucked up heart of
grace,
Swooped down at waif and stray, made furtively our place
Pay tax and toll, then borne the booty to enrich
Her paradise i' the waste; the how and why of which,
That is the secret, there the mystery that stings!

X.

For, what they traffic in, consists of just the things
We,—proud ones who so scorn dwellers without the
pale,
Bateleurs, baladines, white leviers of black mail,—
I say, they sell what we most pique us that we keep!
How comes it, all we hold so dear they count so cheap?

XI.

What price should you impose, for instance, on repute,
Good fame, your own good fame and family's to boot?
Stay start of quick moustache, arrest the angry rise

Of eyebrow! All I asked is answered by surprise.
Now tell me: are you worth the cost of a cigar?
Go boldly, enter booth, disburse the coin at bar
Of doorway where presides the master of the troop,
And forthwith you survey his Graces in a group,
Live Picture, picturesque no doubt and close to life:
His sisters, right and left; the Grace in front, his wife.
Next, who is this performs the feat of the Trapeze?
Lo, she is launched, look—fie, the fairy!—how she flees
O'er all those heads thrust back,—mouths, eyes, one gape and stare,—
No scrap of skirt impedes free passage through the air,
Till, plumb on the other side, she lights and laughs again,
That fairy-form, whereof each muscle, nay, each vein
The curious may inspect,—his daughter that he sells
Each rustic for five sous. Desiderate aught else
O' the vendor? As you leave his show, why, joke the man!
"You cheat: your six-legged sheep, I recollect, began
Both life and trade, last year, trimmed properly and clipt,
As the Twin-headed Babe, and Human Nondescript!"
What does he care? You paid his price, may pass your jest.
So values he repute, good fame, and all the rest!

XII.

But try another tack; say: "I indulge caprice,
Who am Don and Duke, and Knight, beside, o' the Golden Fleece,
And, never mind how rich. Abandon this career!
Have hearth and home, nor let your womankind appear
Without as multiplied a coating as protects
An onion from the eye! Become, in all respects,
God-fearing householder, subsistent by brain-skill,
Hand-labour; win your bread whatever way you will,
So it be honestly,—and, while I have a purse,
Means shall not lack!"—His thanks will be the roundest curse
That ever rolled from lip.

XIII.

Now, what is it?—returns
The question—heartens so this losel that he spurns
All we so prize? I want, put down in black and white,
What compensating joy, unknown and infinite,
Turns lawlessness to law, makes destitution—wealth,
Vice—virtue, and disease of soul and body—health?

XIV.

Ah, the slow shake of head, the melancholy smile,
The sigh almost a sob! What 's wrong, was right erewhile?
Why are we two at once such ocean-width apart?
Pale fingers press my arm, and sad eyes probe my heart.
Why is the wife in trouble?

XV.

This way, this way, Fifine!
Here 's she, shall make my thoughts be surer what they mean!
First let me read the signs, pourtray you past mistake
The gipsy's foreign self, no swarth our sun could bake.
Yet where 's a woolly trace degrades the wiry hair?
And note the Greek-nymph nose, and—oh, my Hebrew pair
Of eye and eye—o'erarched by velvet of the mole—
That swim as in a sea, that dip and rise and roll,
Spilling the light around! While either ear is cut
Thin as a dusk-leaved rose carved from a cocoa-nut.
And then, her neck! now, grant you had the power to deck,
Just as your fancy pleased, the bistre-length of neck,

Could lay, to shine against its shade, a moonlike row
Of pearls, each round and white as bubble Cupids blow
Big out of mother's milk,—what pearl-moon would surpass
That string of mock-turquoise, those almandines of glass,
Where girlhood terminates? for with breasts'-birth commence
The boy, and page-costume, till pink and impudence
End admirably all: complete the creature trips
Our way now, brings sunshine upon her spangled hips,
As here she fronts us full, with pose half-frank, half-fierce!

XVI.

Words urged in vain, Elvire! You waste your quarte and tierce,
Lunge at a phantom here, try fence in fairy-land.
For me, I own defeat, ask but to understand
The acknowledged victory of whom I call my queen,
Sexless and bloodless sprite: though mischievous and mean,
Yet free and flower-like too, with loveliness for law,
And self-sustainment made morality.

XVII.

A flaw
Do you account i' the lily, of lands which travellers know,
That, just as golden gloom supersedes Northern snow
I' the chalice, so, about each pistil, spice is packed,—
Deliriously-drugged scent, in lieu of odour lacked,
With us, by bee and moth, their banquet to enhance
At morn and eve, when dew, the chilly sustenance,
Needs mixture of some chaste and temperate perfume?
I ask, is she in fault who guards such golden gloom,
Such dear and damning scent, by who cares what devices,
And takes the idle life of insects she entices
When, drowned to heart's desire, they satiate the inside
O' the lily, mark her wealth and manifest her pride?

XVIII.

But, wiser, we keep off, nor tempt the acrid juice;
Discreet we peer and praise, put rich things to right use.
No flavourous venomed bell,—the rose it is, I wot,
Only the rose, we pluck and place, unwronged a jot,
No worse for homage done by every devotee,
I' the proper loyal throne, on breast where rose should be.

Or if the simpler sweets we have to choose among,
Would taste between our teeth, and give its toy the tongue,—
O gorgeous poison-plague, on thee no hearts are set!
We gather daisy meek, or maiden violet:
I think it is Elvire we love, and not Fifine.

XIX.

"How does she make my thoughts be sure of what they mean?"
Judge and be just! Suppose, an age and time long past
Renew for our behoof one pageant more, the last
O' the kind, sick Louis liked to see defile between
Him and the yawning grave, its passage served to screen.
With eye as grey as lead, with cheek as brown as bronze,
Here where we stand, shall sit and suffer Louis Onze:
The while from yonder tent parade forth, not—oh, no—
Bateleurs, baladines! but range themselves a-row
Those well-sung women-worthies whereof loud fame still finds
Some echo linger faint, less in our hearts than minds.

XX.

See, Helen! pushed in front o' the world's worst night and storm,
By Lady Venus' hand on shoulder: the sweet form

Shrinkingly prominent, though mighty, like a moon
Outbreaking from a cloud, to put harsh things in tune,
And magically bring mankind to acquiesce
In its own ravage,—call no curse upon, but bless
(Beldame, a moment since) the outbreaking beauty, now,
That casts o'er all the blood a candour from her brow.
See, Cleopatra! bared, the entire and sinuous wealth
O' the shining shape; each orb of indolent ripe health,
Captured, just where it finds a fellow-orb as fine
I' the body: traced about by jewels which outline,
Fire-frame, and keep distinct, perfections—lest they melt
To soft smooth unity ere half their hold be felt:
Yet, o'er that white and wonder, a soul's predominance
I' the head so high and haught—except one thievish glance,
From back of oblong eye, intent to count the slain.
Hush,—O I know, Elvire! Be patient, more remain!
What say you to Saint . . . Pish! Whatever Saint you please,
Cold-pinnacled aloft o' the spire, prays calm the seas
From Pornic Church, and oft at midnight (peasants say)
Goes walking out to save from shipwreck: well she may!
For think how many a year has she been conversant
With nought but winds and rains, sharp courtesy and scant

O' the wintry snow that coats the pent-house of her
shrine,
Covers each knee, climbs near, but spares the smile benign
Which seems to say "I looked for scarce so much from
earth!"
She follows, one long thin pure finger in the girth
O' the girdle—whence the folds of garment, eye and eye,
Besprent with fleurs-de-lys, flow down and multiply
Around her feet,—and one, pressed hushingly to lip:
As if, while thus we made her march, some foundering
ship
Might miss her from her post, nearer to God half-way
In heaven, and she inquired "Who that treads earth can
pray?
I doubt if even she, the unashamed! though, sure,
She must have stripped herself only to clothe the poor."

XXI.

This time, enough's a feast, not one more form,
Elvire!
Provided you allow that, bringing up the rear
O' the bevy I am loth to—by one bird—curtail,
First note may lead to last, an octave crown the scale,
And this feminity be followed—do not flout!—
By—who concludes the masque with curtsey, smile and
pout,

Submissive-mutinous? No other than Fifine
Points toe, imposes haunch, and pleads with tambourine!

XXII.

"Well, what's the meaning here, what does the masque
intend,
Which, unabridged, we saw file past us, with no end
Of fair ones, till Fifine came, closed the catalogue?"

XXIII.

Task fancy yet again! Suppose you cast this clog
Of flesh away (that weeps, upbraids, withstands my arm)
And pass to join your peers, paragon charm with charm,
As I shall show you may,—prove best of beauty there!
Yourself confront yourself! This, help me to declare
That yonder-you, who stand beside these, braving each
And blinking none, beat her who lured to Troy-town beach
The purple prows of Greece,—nay, beat Fifine; whose
face,
Mark how I will inflame, when seigneur-like I place
I' the tambourine, to spot the strained and piteous blank
Of pleading parchment, see, no less than a whole franc!

XXIV.

Ah, do you mark the brown o' the cloud, made bright
with fire
Through and through? as, old wiles succeeding to desire,

Quality (you and I) once more compassionate
A hapless infant, doomed (fie on such partial fate!)
To sink the inborn shame, waive privilege of sex,
And posture as you see, support the nods and becks
Of clowns that have their stare, nor always pay its price;
An infant born perchance as sensitive and nice
As any soul of you, proud dames, whom destiny
Keeps uncontaminate from stigma of the stye
She wallows in! You draw back skirts from filth like her
Who, possibly, braves scorn, if, scorned, she minister
To age, want, and disease of parents one or both;
Nay, peradventure, stoops to degradation, loth
That some just-budding sister, the dew yet on the rose,
Should have to share in turn the ignoble trade,—who knows?

XXV.

Ay, who indeed! Myself know nothing, but dare guess
That off she trips in haste to hand the booty . . . yes,
'Twixt fold and fold of tent, there looms he, dim-discerned,
The ogre, lord of all those lavish limbs have earned!
—Brute-beast-face,—ravage, scar, scowl and malignancy,—
O' the Strong Man, whom (no doubt, her husband) by-and-by

You shall behold do feats: lift up nor quail beneath
A quintal in each hand, a cart-wheel 'twixt his teeth.
Oh she prefers sheer strength to ineffective grace,
Breeding and culture! seeks the essential in the case!
To him has flown my franc; and welcome, if that squint
O' the diabolic eye so soften through absinthe,
That, for once, tambourine, tunic and tricot 'scape
Their customary curse "Not half the gain o' the ape!"
Ay, they go in together!

XXVI.

Yet still her phantom stays
Opposite, where you stand: as steady 'neath our gaze—
The live Elvire's and mine—though fancy-stuff and mere
Illusion; to be judged,—dream-figures,—without fear
Or favour, those the false, by you and me the true.

XXVII.

"What puts it in my head to make yourself judge you?"
Well, it may be, the name of Helen brought to mind
A certain myth I mused in years long left behind:
How she that fled from Greece with Paris whom she loved,
And came to Troy, and there found shelter, and so proved

Such cause of the world's woe,—how she, old stories call
This creature, Helen's self, never saw Troy at all.
Jove had his fancy-fit, must needs take empty air,
Fashion her likeness forth, and set the phantom there
I' the midst for sport, to try conclusions with the blind
And blundering race, the game create for Gods, mankind:
Experiment on these,—establish who would yearn
To give up life for her, who, other-minded, spurn
The best her eyes could smile,—make half the world sublime,
And half absurd, for just a phantom all the time!
Meanwhile true Helen's self sat, safe and far away,
By a great river-side, beneath a purer day,
With solitude around, tranquillity within;
Was able to lean forth, look, listen, through the din
And stir; could estimate the worthlessness or worth
Of Helen who inspired such passion to the earth,
A phantom all the time! That put it in my head,
To make yourself judge you—the phantom-wife instead
O' the tearful true Elvire!

XXVIII.

I thank the smile at last
Which thins away the tear! Our sky was overcast,

And something fell; but day clears up: if there chanced
rain,
The landscape glistens more. I have not vexed in vain
Elvire: because she knows, now she has stood the test,
How, this and this being good, herself may still be best
O' the beauty in review; because the flesh that claimed
Unduly my regard, she thought, the taste, she blamed
In me, for things extern, was all mistake, she finds,—
Or will find, when I prove that bodies show me minds,
That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures,
And sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest
covertures,—
All by demonstrating the value of Fifine!

XXIX.

Partake my confidence! No creature 's made so mean
But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,
Its supreme worth: fulfils, by ordinance of fate,
Its momentary task, gets glory all its own,
Tastes triumph in the world, pre-eminent, alone.
Where is the single grain of sand, mid millions heaped
Confusedly on the beach, but, did we know, has leaped
Or will leap, would we wait, i' the century, some once,
To the very throne of things?—earth's brightest for the
nonce,

When sunshine shall impinge on just that grain's facette
Which fronts him fullest, first, returns his ray with jet
Of promptest praise, thanks God best in creation's name!
As firm is my belief, quick sense perceives the same
Self-vindicating flash illustrate every man
And woman of our mass, and prove, throughout the plan,
No detail but, in place allotted it, was prime
And perfect.

XXX.

Witness her, kept waiting all this time!
What happy angle makes Fifine reverberate
Sunshine, least sand-grain, she, of shadiest social state?
No adamantine shield, polished like Helen there,
Fit to absorb the sun, regorge him till the glare,
Dazing the universe, draw Troy-ward those blind beaks
Of equal-sided ships rowed by the well-greaved Greeks!
No Asian mirror, like yon Ptolemaic witch
Able to fix sun fast and tame sun down, enrich,
Not burn the world with beams thus flatteringly rolled
About her, head to foot, turned slavish snakes of gold!
And oh, no tinted pane of oriel sanctity,
Does our Fifine afford, such as permits supply
Of lustrous heaven, revealed, far more than mundane sight
Could master, to thy cell, pure Saint! where, else too
bright,

So suits thy sense the orb, that, what outside was noon,
Pales, through thy lozenged blue, to meek benefic moon!
What then? does that prevent each dunghill, we may pass
Daily, from boasting too its bit of looking-glass,
Its sherd which, sun-smit, shines, shoots arrowy fire beyond
That satin-muffled mope, your sulky diamond?

XXXI.

And now, the mingled ray she shoots, I decompose.
Her antecedents, take for execrable! Gloze
No whit on your premiss: let be, there was no worst
Of degradation spared Fifine: ordained from first
To last, in body and soul, for one life-long debauch,
The Pariah of the North, the European Nautch!
This, far from seek to hide, she puts in evidence
Calmly, displays the brand, bids pry without offence
Your finger on the place. You comment "Fancy us
So operated on, maltreated, mangled thus!
Such torture in our case, had we survived an hour?
Some other sort of flesh and blood must be, with power
Appropriate to the vile, unsensitive, tough-thonged,
In lieu of our fine nerve! Be sure, she was not wronged

Too much: you must not think she winced at prick as
we!"
Come, come, that 's what you say, or would, were thoughts
but free.

XXXII.

Well then, thus much confessed, what wonder if there
steal
Unchallenged to my heart the force of one appeal
She makes, and justice stamp the sole claim she asserts?
So absolutely good is truth, truth never hurts
The teller, whose worst crime gets somehow grace,
avowed.
To me, that silent pose and prayer proclaimed aloud
"Know all of me outside, the rest be emptiness
For such as you! I call attention to my dress,
Coiffure, outlandish features, lithe memorable limbs,
Piquant entreaty, all that eye-glance over-skims.
Does this give pleasure? Then, repay the pleasure, put
Its price i' the tambourine! Do you seek further? Tut!
I 'm just my instrument,—sound hollow: mere smooth
skin
Stretched o'er gilt framework, I: rub-dub, nought else
within—
Always, for such as you!—if I have use elsewhere,—
If certain bells, now mute, can jingle, need you care?

Be it enough, there 's truth i' the pleading, which comports
With no word spoken out in cottages or courts,
Since all I plead is 'Pay for just the sight you see,
'And give no credit to another charm in me!'
Do I say, like your Love? 'To praise my face is well,
'But, who would know my worth, must search my heart
to tell!'
Do I say, like your Wife? 'Had I passed in review
'The produce of the globe, my man of men were—you!'
Do I say, like your Helen? 'Yield yourself up, obey
'Implicitly, nor pause to question, to survey
'Even the worshipful! prostrate you at my shrine!
'Shall you dare controvert what the world counts divine?
'Array your private taste, own liking of the sense,
'Own longing of the soul, against the impudence
'Of history, the blare and bullying of verse?
'As if man ever yet saw reason to disburse
'The amount of what sense liked, soul longed for,—
given, devised
'As love, forsooth,—until the price was recognized
'As moderate enough by divers fellow-men!
'Then, with his warrant safe that these would love too,
then,
'Sure that particular gain implies a public loss,
'And that no smile he buys but proves a slash across
'The face, a stab into the side of somebody—

'Sure that, along with love's main-purchase, he will buy
'Up the whole stock of earth's uncharitableness,
'Envy and hatred,—then, decides he to profess
'His estimate of one, by love discerned, though dim
'To all the world beside: since what 's the world to him?'
Do I say, like your Queen of Egypt? 'Who foregoes
'My cup of witchcraft—fault be on the fool! He knows
'Nothing of how I pack my wine-press, turn its winch
'Three-times-three, all the time to song and dance, nor flinch
'From charming on and on, till at the last I squeeze
'Out the exhaustive drop that leaves behind mere lees
'And dregs, vapidity, thought essence heretofore!
'Sup of my sorcery, old pleasures please no more!
'Be great, be good, love, learn, have potency of hand
'Or heart or head,—what boots? You die, nor understand
'What bliss might be in life: you ate the grapes, but knew
'Never the taste of wine, such vintage as I brew!'
Do I say, like your Saint? 'An exquisitest touch
'Bides in the birth of things: no after-time can much
'Enhance that fine, that faint, fugitive first of all!
'What colour paints the cup o' the May-rose, like the small
'Suspicion of a blush which doubtfully begins?

'What sound outwarbles brook, while, at the source, it wins
'That moss and stone dispart, allow its bubblings breathe?
'What taste excels the fruit, just where sharp flavours sheathe
'Their sting, and let encroach the honey that allays?
'And so with soul and sense; when sanctity betrays
'First fear lest earth below seem real as heaven above,
'And holy worship, late, change soon to sinful love—
'Where is the plenitude of passion which endures
'Comparison with that, I ask of amateurs?'
Do I say, like Elvire" . . .

XXXIII.

(Your husband holds you fast
Will have you listen, learn your character at last!)
"Do I say?—like her mixed unrest and discontent,
Reproachfulness and scorn, with that submission blent
So strangely, in the face, by sad smiles and gay tears,—
Quiescence which attacks, rebellion which endears,—
Say? 'As you loved me once, could you but love me now!
'Years probably have graved their passage on my brow,
'Lips turn more rarely red, eyes sparkle less than erst;
'Such tribute body pays to time; but, unamerced,
'The soul retains, nay, boasts old treasure multiplied.

'Though dew-prime flee,—mature at noonday, love defied
'Chance, the wind, change, the rain: love, strenuous all the more
'For storm, struck deeper root and choicer fruitage bore,
'Despite the rocking world; yet truth struck root in vain:
'While tenderness bears fruit, you praise, not taste again.
'Why? They are yours, which once were hardly yours, might go
'To grace another's ground: and then—the hopes we know,
'The fears we keep in mind!—when, ours to arbitrate,
'Your part was to bow neck, bid fall decree of fate.
'Then, O the knotty point—white-night's work to revolve—
'What meant that smile, that sigh? Not Solon's self could solve!
'Then, O the deep surmise what one word might express,
'And if what seemed her "No" may not have meant her "Yes!"
'Then, such annoy, for cause—calm welcome, such acquist
'Of rapture if, refused her arm, hand touched her wrist!
'Now, what 's a smile to you? Poor candle that lights up
'The decent household gloom which sends you out to sup.
'A tear? worse! warns that health requires you keep aloof
'From nuptial chamber, since rain penetrates the roof!

'Soul, body got and gained, inalienably safe
'Your own, become despised; more worth has any waif
'Or stray from neighbour's pale: pouch that,—'t is pleasure, pride,
'Novelty, property, and larceny beside!
'Preposterous thought! to find no value fixed in things,
'To covet all you see, hear, dream of, till fate brings
'About that, what you want, you gain; then follows change.
'Give you the sun to keep, forthwith must fancy range:
'A goodly lamp, no doubt,—yet might you catch her hair
'And capture, as she frisks, the fen-fire dancing there!
'What do I say? at least a meteor 's half in heaven;
'Provided filth but shine, my husband hankers even
'After putridity that 's phosphorescent, cribs
'The rustic's tallow-rush, makes spoil of urchins' squibs,
'In short prefers to me—chaste, temperate, serene—
'What sputters green and blue, this fizgig called Fifine!'"

XXXIV.

So all your sex mistake! Strange that so plain a fact
Should raise such dire debate! Few families were racked
By torture self-supplied, did Nature grant but this—
That women comprehend mental analysis!

XXXV.

Elvire, do you recall when, years ago, our home
The intimation reached, a certain pride of Rome,
Authenticated piece, in the third, last and best
Manner,—whatever fools and connoisseurs contest,—
No particle disturbed by rude restorer's touch,
The palaced picture-pearl, so long eluding clutch
Of creditor, at last, the Rafael might—could we
But come to terms—change lord, pass from the Prince to me?
I think you recollect my fever of a year:
How the Prince would, and how he would not; now,—too dear
That promise was, he made his grandsire so long since,
Rather to boast "I own a Rafael" than "am Prince!"
And now, the fancy soothed—if really sell he must
His birthright for a mess of pottage—such a thrust
I' the vitals of the Prince were mollified by balm,
Could he prevail upon his stomach to bear qualm,
And bequeath Liberty (because a purchaser
Was ready with the sum—a trifle!) yes, transfer
His heart at all events to that land where, at least,
Free institutions reign! And so, its price increased
Five-fold (Americans are such importunates!),
Soon must his Rafael start for the United States.

O alternating bursts of hope now, then despair!
At last, the bargain 's struck, I 'm all but beggared, there
The Rafael faces me, in fine, no dream at all,
My housemate, evermore to glorify my wall.
A week must pass, before heart-palpitations sink,
In gloating o'er my gain, so late I edged the brink
Of doom; a fortnight more, I spent in Paradise:
"Was outline e'er so true, could colouring entice
So calm, did harmony and quiet so avail?
How right, how resolute, the action tells the tale!"
A month, I bid my friends congratulate their best:
"You happy Don!" (to me): "The blockhead!" (to the rest):
"No doubt he thinks his daub original, poor dupe!"
Then I resume my life: one chamber must not coop
Man's life in, though it boast a marvel like my prize.
Next year, I saunter past with unaverted eyes,
Nay, loll and turn my back: perchance to overlook
With relish, leaf by leaf, Doré's last picture-book.

XXXVI.

Imagine that a voice reproached me from its frame:
"Here do I hang, and may! Your Rafael, just the same,
'T is only you that change: no ecstasies of yore!
No purposed suicide distracts you any more!"

Prompt would my answer meet such frivolous attack:
"You misappropriate sensations. What men lack,
And labour to obtain, is hoped and feared about
After a fashion; what they once obtain, makes doubt,
Expectancy's old fret and fume, henceforward void.
But do they think to hold such havings unalloyed
By novel hopes and fears, of fashion just as new,
To correspond i' the scale? Nowise, I promise you!
Mine you are, therefore mine will be, as fit to cheer
My soul and glad my sense to-day as this-day-year.
So, any sketch or scrap, pochade, caricature,
Made in a moment, meant a moment to endure,
I snap at, seize, enjoy, then tire of, throw aside,
Find you in your old place. But if a servant cried
'Fire in the gallery!'—methinks, were I engaged
In Doré, elbow-deep, picture-books million-paged
To the four winds would pack, sped by the heartiest curse
Was ever launched from lip, to strew the universe.
Would not I brave the best o' the burning, bear away
Either my perfect piece in safety, or else stay
And share its fate, be made its martyr nor repine?
Inextricably wed, such ashes mixed with mine!"

XXXVII.

For which I get the eye, the hand, the heart, the whole
O' the wondrous wife again!

XXXVIII.

But no, play out your *rôle*
I' the pageant! 'T is not fit your phantom leave the stage:
I want you, there, to make you, here, confess you wage
Successful warfare, pique those proud ones, and advance
Claim to . . . equality? nay, but predominance
In *physique* o'er them all, where Helen heads the scene
Closed by its tiniest of tail-tips, pert Fifine.
How ravishingly pure you stand in pale constraint!
My new-created shape, without or touch or taint,
Inviolate of life and worldliness and sin—
Fettered, I hold my flower, her own cup's weight would win
From off the tall slight stalk a-top of which she turns
And trembles, makes appeal to one who roughly earns
Her thanks instead of blame, (did lily only know),
By thus constraining length of lily, letting snow
Of cup-crown, that 's her face, look from its guardian stake,
Superb on all that crawls beneath, and mutely make
Defiance, with the mouth's white movement of disdain,
To all that stoops, retires and hovers round again!
How windingly the limbs delay to lead up, reach
Where, crowned, the head waits calm: as if reluctant, each,

That eye should traverse quick such lengths of loveliness,
From feet, which just are found embedded in the dress
Deep swathed about with folds and flowings virginal,
Up to the pleated breasts, rebellious 'neath their pall,
As if the vesture's snow were moulding sleep not death,
Must melt and so release; whereat, from the fine sheath,
The flower-cup-crown starts free, the face is unconcealed,
And what shall now divert me, once the sweet face revealed,
From all I loved so long, so lingeringly left?

XXXIX.

Because indeed your face fits into just the cleft
O' the heart of me, Elvire, makes right and whole once more
All that was half itself without you! As before,
My truant finds its place! Doubtlessly sea-shells yearn,
If plundered by sad chance: would pray their pearls return,
Let negligently slip away into the wave!
Never may eyes desist, those eyes so grey and grave,
From their slow sure supply of the effluent soul within!
And, would you humour me? I dare to ask, unpin
The web of that brown hair! O'erwash o' the sudden, but
As promptly, too, disclose, on either side, the jut

Of alabaster brow! So part rich rillets dyed
Deep by the woodland leaf, when down they pour, each side
O' the rock-top, pushed by Spring!

XL.

"And where i' the world is all
This wonder, you detail so trippingly, espied?
My mirror would reflect a tall, thin, pale, deep-eyed
Personage, pretty once, it may be, doubtless still
Loving,—a certain grace yet lingers, if you will,—
But all this wonder, where?"

XLI.

Why, where but in the sense
And soul of me, Art's judge? Art is my evidence
That something was, is, might be; but no more thing itself,
Than flame is fuel. Once the verse-book laid on shelf,
The picture turned to wall, the music fled from ear,—
Each beauty, born of each, grows clearer and more clear,
Mine henceforth, ever mine!

XLII.

But if I would re-trace
Effect, in Art, to cause,—corroborate, erase

What 's right or wrong i' the lines, test fancy in my brain
By fact which gave it birth? I re-peruse in vain
The verse, I fail to find that vision of delight
I' the Bazzi's lost-profile, eye-edge so exquisite.
And, music: what? that burst of pillared cloud by day
And pillared fire by night, was product, must we say,
Of modulating just, by enharmonic change,—
The augmented sixth resolved,—from out the straighter range
Of D sharp minor,—leap of disimprisoned thrall,—
Into thy light and life, D major natural?

XLIII.

Elvire, will you partake in what I shall impart?
I seem to understand the way heart chooses heart
By help of the outside form,—a reason for our wild
Diversity in choice,—why each grows reconciled
To what is absent, what superfluous in the mask
Of flesh that 's meant to yield,—did nature ply her task
As artist should,—precise the features of the soul,
Which, if in any case they found expression, whole
I' the traits, would give a type, undoubtedly display
A novel, true, distinct perfection in its way.
Never shall I believe any two souls were made
Similar; granting, then, each soul of every grade

Was meant to be itself, prove in itself complete
And, in completion, good,—nay, best o' the kind,—as meet
Needs must it be that show on the outside correspond
With inward substance,—flesh, the dress which soul has donned,
Exactly reproduce,—were only justice done
Inside and outside too,—types perfect everyone.
How happens it that here we meet a mystery
Insoluble to man, a plaguy puzzle? Why
Each soul is either made imperfect, and deserves
As rude a face to match; or else a bungler swerves,
And nature, on a soul worth rendering aright,
Works ill, or proves perverse, or, in her own despite,
—Here too much, there too little,—bids each face, more or less,
Retire from beauty, make approach to ugliness?
And yet succeeds the same: since, what is wanting to success,
If somehow every face, no matter how deform,
Evidence, to some one of hearts on earth, that, warm
Beneath the veriest ash, there hides a spark of soul
Which, quickened by love's breath, may yet pervade the whole
O' the grey, and, free again, be fire?—of worth the same,
Howe'er produced, for, great or little, flame is flame.
A mystery, whereof solution is to seek.

XLIV.

I find it in the fact that each soul, just as weak
Its own way as its fellow,—departure from design
As flagrant in the flesh,—goes striving to combine
With what shall right the wrong, the under or above
The standard: supplement unloveliness by love.
—Ask Plato else! And this corroborates the sage,
That Art,—which I may style the love of loving, rage
Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things
For truth's sake, whole and sole, not any good, truth brings
The knower, seer, feeler, beside,—instinctive Art
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct thereby the ultimate entire.
Art, working with a will, discards the superflux,
Contributes to defect, toils on till,—*fiat lux*,—
There 's the restored, the prime, the individual type!

XLV.

Look, for example now! This piece of broken pipe
(Some shipman's solace erst) shall act as crayon; and
What tablet better serves my purpose than the sand?

—Smooth slab whereon I draw, no matter with what skill,
A face, and yet another, and yet another still.
There lie my three prime types of beauty!

XLVI.

Laugh your best!
"Exaggeration and absurdity?" Confessed!
Yet, what may that face mean, no matter for its nose,
A yard long, or its chin, a foot short?

XLVII.

"You suppose,
Horror?" Exactly! What's the odds if, more or less
By yard or foot, the features do manage to express
Such meaning in the main? Were I of Gérôme's force,
Nor feeble as you see, quick should my crayon course
O'er outline, curb, excite, till,—so completion speeds
With Gérôme well at work,—observe how brow recedes,
Head shudders back on spine, as if one haled the hair,
Would have the full-face front what pin-point eye's sharp stare
Announces; mouth agape to drink the flowing fate,
While chin protrudes to meet the burst o' the wave: elate

Almost, spurred on to brave necessity, expend
All life left, in one flash, as fire does at its end.
Retrenchment and addition effect a masterpiece,
Not change i' the motive: here diminish, there increase—
And who wants Horror, has it.

XLVIII.

Who wants some other show
Of soul, may seek elsewhere—this second of the row?
What does it give for germ, monadic mere intent
Of mind in face, faint first of meanings ever meant?
Why, possibly, a grin, that, strengthened, grows a laugh;
That, softened, leaves a smile; that, tempered, bids you quaff
At such a magic cup as English Reynolds once
Compounded: for the witch pulls out of you response
Like Garrick's to Thalia, however due may be
Your homage claimed by that stiff-stoled Melpomene!

XLIX.

And just this one face more! Pardon the bold pretence!
May there not lurk some hint, struggle toward evidence
In that compressed mouth, those strained nostrils, steadfast eyes
Of utter passion, absolute self-sacrifice,

Which,—could I but subdue the wild grotesque, refine
That bulge of brow, make blunt that nose's aquiline,
And let, although compressed, a point of pulp appear
I' the mouth,—would give at last the portrait of Elvire?

L.

Well, and if so succeed hand-practice on awry
Preposterous art-mistake, shall soul-proficiency
Despair,—when exercised on nature, which at worst
Always implies success, however crossed and curst
By failure,—such as art would emulate in vain?
Shall any soul despair of setting free again
Trait after trait, until the type as wholly start
Forth, visible to sense, as that minutest part,
(Whate'er the chance) which first arresting eye, warned soul
That, under wrong enough and ravage, lay the whole
O' the loveliness it "loved"—I take the accepted phrase?

LI.

So I account for tastes: each chooses, none gainsays
The fancy of his fellow, a paradise for him,
A hell for all beside. You can but crown the brim
O' the cup; if it be full, what matters less or more?
Let each, i' the world, amend his love, as I, o' the shore

My sketch, and the result as undisputed be!
Their handiwork to them, and my Elvire to me:
—Result more beautiful than beauty's self, when lo,
What was my Rafael turns my Michelagnolo!

LII.

For, we two boast, beside our pearl, a diamond.
I' the palace-gallery, the corridor beyond,
Upheaves itself a marble, a magnitude man-shaped
As snow might be. One hand,—the Master's,—smoothed and scraped
That mass, he hammered on and hewed at, till he hurled
Life out of death, and left a challenge: for the world,
Death still,—since who shall dare, close to the image, say
If this be purposed Art, or mere mimetic play
Of Nature?—wont to deal with crag or cloud, as stuff
To fashion novel forms, like forms we know, enough
For recognition, but enough unlike the same,
To leave no hope ourselves may profit by her game;
Death therefore to the world. Step back a pace or two!
And then, who dares dispute the gradual birth its due
Of breathing life, or breathless immortality,
Where out she stands, and yet stops short, half bold, half shy,

Hesitates on the threshold of things, since partly blent
With stuff she needs must quit, her native element
I' the mind o' the Master,—what's the creature, dear-
divine
Yet earthly-awful too, so manly-feminine,
Pretends this white advance? What startling brain-escape
Of Michelagnolo takes elemental shape?
I think he meant the daughter of the old man o' the sea,
Emerging from her wave, goddess Eidotheé—
She who, in elvish sport, spite with benevolence
Mixed Mab wise up, must needs instruct the Hero
whence
Salvation dawns o'er that mad misery of his isle.
Yes, she imparts to him, by what a pranksome wile
He may surprise her sire, asleep beneath a rock,
When he has told their tale, amid his web-foot flock
Of sea-beasts, "fine fat seals with bitter breath!" laughs
she
At whom she likes to save, no less: Eidotheé,
Whom you shall never face evolved, in earth, in air,
In wave; but, manifest i' the soul's domain, why, there
She ravishingly moves to meet you, all through aid
O' the soul! Bid shine what should, dismiss into the
shade
What should not be,—and there triumphs the paramount
Emprise o' the Master! But, attempt to make account

Of what the sense, without soul's help, perceives? I
bought
That work—(despite plain proof, whose hand it was had
wrought
I' the rough: I think we trace the tool of triple tooth,
Here, there and everywhere)—bought dearly that uncouth
Unwieldy bulk, for just ten dollars—"Bulk, would fetch—
Converted into lime—some five pauls!" grinned a wretch,
Who, bound on business, paused to hear the bargaining,
And would have pitied me "but for the fun o' the thing!"

LIII.

Shall such a wretch be—you? Must—while I show
Elvire
Shaming all other forms, seen as I see her here
I' the soul,—this other-you perversely look outside,
And ask me, "Where i' the world is charm to be descried
I' the tall thin personage, with paled eye, pensive face,
Any amount of love, and some remains of grace?"
See yourself in my soul!

LIV.

And what a world for each
Must somehow be i' the soul,—accept that mode of
speech,—
Whether an aura gird the soul, wherein it seems

To float and move, a belt of all the glints and gleams
It struck from out that world, its weaklier fellows found
So dead and cold; or whether these not so much
surround,
As pass into the soul itself, add worth to worth,
As wine enriches blood, and straightway send it forth,
Conquering and to conquer, through all eternity,
That 's battle without end.

LV.

I search but cannot see
What purpose serves the soul that strives, or world it tries
Conclusions with, unless the fruit of victories
Stay, one and all, stored up and guaranteed its own
For ever, by some mode whereby shall be made known
The gain of every life. Death reads the title clear—
What each soul for itself conquered from out things here:
Since, in the seeing soul, all worth lies, I assert,—
And nought i' the world, which, save for soul that sees,
inert
Was, is, and would be ever,—stuff for transmuting,—null
And void until man's breath evoke the beautiful—
But, touched aright, prompt yields each particle its tongue
Of elemental flame,—no matter whence flame sprung
From gums and spice, or else from straw and rottenness,
So long as soul has power to make them burn, express

What lights and warms henceforth, leaves only ash
behind,
Howe'er the chance: if soul be privileged to find
Food so soon that, by first snatch of eye, suck of breath,
It can absorb pure life: or, rather, meeting death
I' the shape of ugliness, by fortunate recoil
So put on its resource, it find therein a foil
For a new birth of life, the challenged soul's response
To ugliness and death,—creation for the nonce.

LVI.

I gather heart through just such conquests of the soul,
Through evocation out of that which, on the whole,
Was rough, ungainly, partial accomplishment, at best,
And—what, at worst, save failure to spit at and detest?—
—Through transference of all, achieved in visible things,
To where, secured from wrong, rest soul's imaginings—
Through ardour to bring help just where completion halts,
Do justice to the purpose, ignore the slips and faults—
And, last, through waging with deformity a fight
Which wrings thence, at the end, precise its opposite.
I praise the loyalty o' the scholar,—stung by taunt
Of fools "Does this evince thy Master men so vaunt?
Did he then perpetrate the plain abortion here?"
Who cries "His work am I! full fraught by him, I clear

His fame from each result of accident and time,
Myself restore his work to its fresh morning-prime,
Not daring touch the mass of marble, fools deride,
But putting my idea in plaster by its side,
His, since mine ; I, he made, vindicate who made me!"

LVII.

For, you must know, I too achieved Eidotheé,
In silence and by night—dared justify the lines
Plain to my soul, although, to sense, that triple-tine's
Achievement halt half-way, break down, or leave a blank.
If she stood forth at last, the Master was to thank!
Yet may there not have smiled approval in his eyes—
That one at least was left who, born to recognize
Perfection in the piece imperfect, worked, that night,
In silence, such his faith, until the apposite
Design was out of him, truth palpable once more?
And then,—for at one blow, its fragments strewed the floor,—
Recalled the same to live within his soul as heretofore.

LVIII.

And, even as I hold and have Eidotheé,
I say, I cannot think that gain,—which would not be
Except a special soul had gained it,—that such gain
Can ever be estranged, do aught but appertain

Immortally, by right firm, indefeasible,
To who performed the feat, through God's grace and man's will!
Gain, never shared by those who practised with earth's stuff,
And spoiled whate'er they touched, leaving its roughness rough,
Its blankness bare, and, when the ugliness opposed,
Either struck work or laughed "He doted or he dozed!"

LIX.

While, oh, how all the more will love become intense
Hereafter, when "to love" means yearning to dispense,
Each soul, its own amount of gain through its own mode
Of practising with life, upon some soul which owed
Its treasure, all diverse and yet in worth the same,
To new work and changed way! Things furnish you rose-flame,
Which burn up red, green, blue, nay, yellow more than needs,
For me, I nowise doubt; why doubt a time succeeds
When each one may impart, and each receive, both share
The chemic secret, learn,—where I lit force, why there
You drew forth lambent pity,—where I found only food
For self-indulgence, you still blew a spark at brood
I' the greyest ember, stopped not till self-sacrifice imbued

Heaven's face with flame? What joy, when each may
supplement
The other, changing each as changed, till, wholly blent,
Our old things shall be new, and, what we both ignite,
Fuse, lose the varicolor in achromatic white!
Exemplifying law, apparent even now
In the eternal progress,—love's law, which I avow
And thus would formulate: each soul lives, longs and
works
For itself, by itself,—because a lodestar lurks,
An other than itself,—in whatsoe'er the niche
Of mistiest heaven it hide, whoe'er the Glumdalclich
May grasp the Gulliver: or it, or he, or she—
Theosutos e broteios eper kekramene,—
(For fun's sake, where the phrase has fastened, leave it
fixed!
So soft it says,—"God, man, or both together mixed"!)
This, guessed at through the flesh, by parts which prove
the whole,
This constitutes the soul discernible by soul
—Elvire, by me!

LX.

"And then"—(pray you, permit remain
This hand upon my arm!—your cheek dried, if you
deign,

Choosing my shoulder)—"then"—(Stand up for, boldly
state
The objection in its length and breadth!) "you abdicate,
With boast yet on your lip, soul's empire, and accept
The rule of sense; the Man, from monarch's throne has
stept—
Leapt, rather, at one bound, to base, and there lies,
Brute.
You talk of soul,—how soul, in search of soul to suit,
Must needs review the sex, the army, rank and file
Of womankind, report no face nor form so vile
But that a certain worth, by certain signs, may thence
Evolve itself and stand confessed—to soul—by sense.
Sense? Oh, the loyal bee endeavours for the hive!
Disinterested hunts the flower-field through, alive
Not one mean moment, no,—suppose on flower he
light,—
To his peculiar drop, petal-dew perquisite,
Matter-of-course snatched snack: unless he taste, how
try?
This, light on tongue-tip laid, allows him pack his thigh,
Transport all he counts prize, provision for the comb,
Food for the future day,—a banquet, but at home!
Soul? Ere you reach Fifine's, some flesh may be to
pass!
That bombéd brow, that eye, a kindling chrysopras,

Beneath its stiff black lash, inquisitive how speeds
Each functionary limb, how play of foot succeeds,
And how you let escape or duly sympathize
With gastroknemian grace,—true, your soul tastes and
tries,
And trifles time with these, but, fear not, will arrive
At essence in the core, bring honey home to hive,
Brain-stock and heart-stuff both—to strike objectors
dumb—
Since only soul affords the soul fit pabulum!
Be frank for charity! Who is it you deceive—
Yourself or me or God, with all this make-believe?"

LXI.

And frank I will respond as you interrogate.
Ah, Music, wouldst thou help! Words struggle with the
weight
So feebly of the False, thick element between
Our soul, the True, and Truth! which, but that intervene
False shows of things, were reached as easily by thought
Reducible to word, as now by yearnings wrought
Up with thy fine free force, oh Music, that canst thrid,
Electrically win a passage through the lid
Of earthly sepulchre, our words may push against,
Hardly transpierce as thou! Not dissipate, thou deign'st,

So much as tricksily elude what words attempt
To heave away, i' the mass, and let the soul, exempt
From all that vapoury obstruction, view, instead
Of glimmer underneath, a glory overhead.
Not feebly, like our phrase, against the barrier go
In suspirative swell the authentic notes I know,
By help whereof, I would our souls were found without
The pale, above the dense and dim which breeds the doubt!
But Music, dumb for you, withdraws her help from me;
And, since to weary words recourse again must be,
At least permit they rest their burthen here and there,
Music-like: cover space! My answer,—need you care
If it exceed the bounds, reply to questioning
You never meant should plague? Once fairly on the wing,
Let me flap far and wide!

LXII.

For this is just the time,
The place, the mood in you and me, when all things chime.
Clash forth life's common chord, whence, list how there ascend
Harmonics far and faint, till our perception end,—
Reverberated notes whence we construct the scale

Embracing what we know and feel and are! How fail
To find or, better, lose your question, in this quick
Reply which nature yields, ample and catholic?
For, arm in arm, we two have reached, nay, passed, you see,
The village-precinct; sun sets mild on Sainte Marie—
We only catch the spire, and yet I seem to know
What 's hid i' the turn o' the hill: how all the graves must glow
Soberly, as each warms its little iron cross,
Flourished about with gold, and graced (if private loss
Be fresh) with stiff rope-wreath of yellow crisp bead-blooms
Which tempt down birds to pay their supper, mid the tombs,
With prattle good as song, amuse the dead awhile,
If couched they hear beneath the matted camomile!

LXIII.

Bid them good-bye before last friend has sung and supped!
Because we pick our path and need our eyes,—abrupt
Descent enough,—but here 's the beach, and there 's the bay,
And, opposite, the streak of Île Noirmoutier.

Thither the waters tend; they freshen as they haste,
At feel o' the night-wind, though, by cliff and cliff embraced,
This breadth of blue retains its self-possession still;
As you and I intend to do, who take our fill
Of sights and sounds—soft sound, the countless hum and skip
Of insects we disturb, and that good fellowship
Of rabbits our foot-fall sends huddling, each to hide
He best knows how and where; and what whirred past, wings wide?
That was an owl, their young may justlier apprehend!
Though you refuse to speak, your beating heart, my friend,
I feel against my arm,—though your bent head forbids
A look into your eyes, yet, on my cheek, their lids
That ope and shut, soft send a silken thrill the same.
Well, out of all and each these nothings, comes—what came
Often enough before, the something that would aim
Once more at the old mark: the impulse to at last
Succeed where hitherto was failure in the past,
And yet again essay the adventure. Clearlier sings
No bird to its couched corpse "Into the truth of things—
Out of their falseness rise, and reach thou, and remain!"

LXIV.

"That rise into the true out of the false—explain?"
May an example serve? In yonder bay I bathed,
This sunny morning: swam my best, then hung, half swathed
With chill, and half with warmth, i' the channel's midmost deep:
You know how one—not treads, but stands in water? Keep
Body and limbs below, hold head back, uplift chin,
And, for the rest, leave care! If brow, eyes, mouth, should win
Their freedom,—excellent! If they must brook the surge,
No matter though they sink, let but the nose emerge.
So, all of me in brine lay soaking: did I care
One jot? I kept alive by man's due breath of air
I' the nostrils, high and dry. At times, o'er these would run
The ripple, even wash the wavelet,—morning's sun
Tempted advance, no doubt: and always flash of froth,
Fish-outbreak, bubbling by, would find me nothing loth
To rise and look around; then all was overswept
With dark and death at once. But trust the old adept!
Back went again the head, a merest motion made,
Fin-fashion, either hand, and nostril soon conveyed

Assurance light and life were still in reach as erst:
Always the last and,—wait and watch,—sometimes the first.
Try to ascend breast-high? wave arms wide free of tether?
Be in the air and leave the water altogether?
Under went all again, till I resigned myself
To only breathe the air, that 's footed by an elf,
And only swim the water, that 's native to a fish.
But there is no denying that, ere I curbed my wish,
And schooled my restive arms, salt entered mouth and eyes
Often enough—sun, sky, and air so tantalize!
Still, the adept swims, this accorded, that denied;
Can always breathe, sometimes see and be satisfied!

LXV.

I liken to this play o' the body,—fruitless strife
To slip the sea and hold the heaven,—my spirit's life,
'Twixt false, whence it would break, and true, where it would bide.
I move in, yet resist, am upborne every side
By what I beat against, an element too gross
To live in, did not soul duly obtain her dose
Of life-breath, and inhale from truth's pure plenitude
Above her, snatch and gain enough to just illude

With hope that some brave bound may baffle evermore
The obstructing medium, make who swam henceforward
soar:
—Gain scarcely snatched when, foiled by the very effort,
sowse,
Underneath ducks the soul, her truthward yearnings dowse
Deeper in falsehood! ay, but fitted less and less
To bear in nose and mouth old briny bitterness
Proved alien more and more: since each experience
proves
Air—the essential good, not sea, wherein who moves
Must thence, in the act, escape, apart from will or wish.
Move a mere hand to take waterweed, jelly-fish,
Upward you tend! And yet our business with the sea
Is not with air, but just o' the water, watery:
We must endure the false, no particle of which
Do we acquaint us with, but up we mount a pitch
Above it, find our head reach truth, while hands explore
The false below: so much while here we bathe,—no
more!

LXVI.

Now, there is one prime point (hear and be edified!)
One truth more true for me than any truth beside—
To-wit, that I am I, who have the power to swim,
The skill to understand the law whereby each limb

May bear to keep immersed, since, in return, made sure
That its mere movement lifts head clean through coverture.
By practice with the false, I reach the true? Why, thence
It follows, that the more I gain self-confidence,
Get proof I know the trick, can float, sink, rise, at will,
The better I submit to what I have the skill
To conquer in my turn, even now, and by and by
Leave wholly for the land, and there laugh, shake me dry
To last drop, saturate with noonday—no need more
Of wet and fret, plagued once: on Pornic's placid shore,
Abundant air to breathe, sufficient sun to feel!
Meantime I buoy myself: no whit my senses reel
When over me there breaks a billow; nor, elate
Too much by some brief taste, I quaff intemperate
The air, o'ertop breast-high the wave-environment.
Full well I know the thing I grasp, as if intent
To hold,—my wandering wave,—will not be grasped at all:
The solid-seeming grasped, the handful great or small
Must go to nothing, glide through fingers fast enough;
But none the less, to treat liquidity as stuff—
Though failure—certainly succeeds beyond its aim,
Sends head above, past thing that hands miss, all the same.

LXVII.

So with this wash o' the world, wherein life-long we drift;
We push and paddle through the foam by making shift
To breathe above at whiles when, after deepest duck
Down underneath the show, we put forth hand and pluck
At what seems somehow like reality—a soul.
I catch at this and that, to capture and control,
Presume I hold a prize, discover that my pains
Are run to nought: my hands are baulked, my head regains
The surface where I breathe and look about, a space.
The soul that helped me mount? Swallowed up in the race
O' the tide, come who knows whence, gone gaily who knows where!
I thought the prize was mine; I flattered myself there.
It did its duty, though: I felt it, it felt me,
Or, where I look about and breathe, I should not be.
The main point is—the false fluidity was bound
Acknowledge that it frothed o'er substance, nowise found
Fluid, but firm and true. Man, outcast, "howls,"—at rods?—
If "sent in playful spray a-shivering to his gods!"

Childishest childe, man makes thereby no bad exchange.
Stay with the flat-fish, thou! We like the upper range
Where the "gods" live, perchance the dæmons also dwell:
Where operates a Power, which every throb and swell
Of human heart invites that human soul approach,
"Sent" near and nearer still, however "spray" encroach
On "shivering" flesh below, to altitudes, which gained,
Evil proves good, wrong right, obscurity explained,
And "howling" childishness. Whose howl have we to thank,
If all the dogs 'gan bark and puppies whine, till sank
Each yelper's tail 'twixt legs? for Huntsman Common-sense
Came to the rescue, bade prompt thwack of thong dispense
Quiet i' the kennel; taught that ocean might be blue,
And rolling and much more, and yet the soul have, too,
Its touch of God's own flame, which He may so expand
"Who measurèd the waters i' the hollow of His hand"
That ocean's self shall dry, turn dew-drop in respect
Of all-triumphant fire, matter with intellect
Once fairly matched; bade him who egged on hounds to bay,
Go curse, i' the poultry yard, his kind: "there let him lay"

The swan's one addled egg: which yet shall put to use,
Rub breast-bone warm against, so many a sterile goose!

LXVIII.

No, I want sky not sea, prefer the larks to shrimps,
And never dive so deep but that I get a glimpse
O' the blue above, a breath of the air around. Elvire,
I seize—by catching at the melted beryl here,
The tawny hair that just has trickled off,—Fifine!
Did not we two trip forth to just enjoy the scene,
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage—
Dabble, and there an end, with foam and froth o'er face,
Till suddenly Fifine suggested change of place?
Now we taste æther, scorn the wave, and interchange apace
No ordinary thoughts, but such as evidence
The cultivated mind in both. On what pretence
Are you and I to sneer at who lent help to hand,
And gave the lucky lift?

LXIX.

Still sour? I understand!
One ugly circumstance discredits my fair plan—

That Woman does the work: I waive the help of Man.
"Why should experiment be tried with only waves,
When solid spars float round? Still some Thalassia saves
Too pertinaciously, as though no Triton, bluff
As e'er blew brine from conch, were free to help enough!
Surely, to recognize a man, his mates serve best!
Why is there not the same or greater interest
In the strong spouse as in the pretty partner, pray,
Were recognition just your object, as you say,
Amid this element o' the false?"

LXX.

We come to terms.
I need to be proved true; and nothing so confirms
One's faith in the prime point that one's alive, not dead,
In all Descents to Hell whereof I ever read,
As when a phantom there, male enemy or friend,
Or merely stranger-shade, is struck, is forced suspend
His passage: "You that breathe, along with us the ghosts?"
Here, why must it be still a woman that accosts?

LXXI.

Because, one woman's worth, in that respect, such hairy hosts
Of the other sex and sort! Men? Say you have the power
To make them yours, rule men, throughout life's little hour,
According to the phrase; what follows? Men, you make,
By ruling them, your own: each man for his own sake
Accepts you as his guide, avails him of what worth
He apprehends in you to sublimate his earth
With fire: content, if so you convoy him through night,
That you shall play the sun, and he, the satellite,
Pilfer your light and heat and virtue, starry pelf,
While, caught up by your course, he turns upon himself.
Women rush into you, and there remain absorbed.
Beside, 't is only men completely formed, full-orbed,
Are fit to follow track, keep pace, illustrate so
The leader: any sort of woman may bestow
Her atom on the star, or clod she counts for such,—
Each little making less bigger by just that much.
Women grow you, while men depend on you at best.
And what dependence! Bring and put him to the test,

Your specimen disciple, a handbreadth separate
From you, he almost seemed to touch before! Abate
Complacency you will, I judge, at what 's divulged!
Some flabbiness you fixed, some vacancy outbulged,
Some—much—nay, all, perhaps, the outward man 's your work:
But, inside man?—find him, wherever he may lurk,
And where 's a touch of you in his true self?

LXXII.

I wish
Some wind would waft this way a glassy bubble-fish
O' the kind the sea inflates, and show you, once detached
From wave . . . or no, the event is better told than watched:
Still may the thing float free, globose and opaline
All over, save where just the amethysts combine
To blue their best, rim-round the sea-flower with a tinge
Earth's violet never knew! Well, 'neath that gem-tipped fringe,
A head lurks—of a kind—that acts as stomach too;
Then comes the emptiness which out the water blew
So big and belly-like, but, dry of water drained,
Withers away nine-tenths. Ah, but a tenth remained!
That was the creature's self: no more akin to sea,

Poor rudimental head and stomach, you agree,
Than sea 's akin to sun who yonder dips his edge.

LXXIII.

But take the rill which ends a race o'er yonder ledge
O' the fissured cliff, to find its fate in smoke below!
Disengage that, and ask—what news of life, you know
It led, that long lone way, through pasture, plain and waste?
All 's gone to give the sea! no touch of earth, no taste
Of air, reserved to tell how rushes used to bring
The butterfly and bee, and fisher-bird that 's king
O' the purple kind, about the snow-soft silver-sweet
Infant of mist and dew; only these atoms fleet,
Embittered evermore, to make the sea one drop
More big thereby—if thought keep count where sense must stop.

LXXIV.

The full-blown ingrate, mere recipient of the brine,
That takes all and gives nought, is Man; the feminine
Rillet that, taking all and giving nought in turn,
Goes headlong to her death i' the sea, without concern
For the old inland life, snow-soft and silver-clear,
That 's woman—typified from Fifine to Elvire.

LXXV.

Then, how diverse the modes prescribed to who would deal
With either kind of creature! 'T is Man, you seek to seal
Your very own? Resolve, for first step, to discard
Nine-tenths of what you are! To make, you must be marred,—
To raise your race, must stoop,—to teach them aught, must learn
Ignorance, meet half-way what most you hope to spurn
I' the sequel. Change yourself, dissimulate the thought
And vulgarize the word, and see the deed be brought
To look like nothing done with any such intent
As teach men—though perchance it teach, by accident!
So may you master men: assured that if you show
One point of mastery, departure from the low
And level,—head or heart-revolt at long disguise,
Immurement, stifling soul in mediocrities,—
If inadvertently a gesture, much more, word
Reveal the hunter no companion for the herd,
His chance of capture 's gone. Success means, they may snuff,
Examine, and report,—a brother, sure enough,
Disports him in brute-guise; for skin is truly skin,

Horns, hoofs are hoofs and horns, and all, outside and in,
Is veritable beast, whom fellow-beasts resigned
May follow, made a prize in honest pride, behind
One of themselves and not creation's upstart lord!
Well, there's your prize i' the pound—much joy may it afford
My Indian! Make survey and tell me,—was it worth
You acted part so well, went all-fours upon earth
The live-long day, brayed, belled, and all to bring to pass
That stags should deign eat hay when winter stints them grass?

LXXVI.

So much for men, and how disguise may make them mind
Their master. But you have to deal with womankind?
Abandon stratagem for strategy! Cast quite
The vile disguise away, try truth clean-opposite
Such creep-and-crawl, stand forth all man and, might it chance,
Somewhat of angel too!—whate'er inheritance,
Actual on earth, in heaven prospective, be your boast,
Lay claim to! Your best self revealed at uttermost,—

That 's the wise way o' the strong! And e'en should
falsehood tempt
The weaker sort to swerve,—at least the lie 's exempt
From slur, that 's loathlier still, of aiming to debase
Rather than elevate its object. Mimic grace,
Not make deformity your mask! Be sick by stealth,
Nor traffic with disease—malingering in health!
No more of: "Countrymen, I boast me one like you—
My lot, the common strength, the common weakness
too!
I think the thoughts you think; and if I have the knack
Of fitting thoughts to words, you peradventure lack,
Envy me not the chance, yourselves more fortunate!
Many the loaded ship self-sunk through treasure-freight,
Many the pregnant brain brought never child to birth,
Many the great heart broke beneath its girdle-girth!
Be mine the privilege to supplement defect,
Give dumbness voice, and let the labouring intellect
Find utterance in word, or possibly in deed!
What though I seem to go before? 't is you that lead!
I follow what I see so plain—the general mind
Projected pillar-wise, flame kindled by the kind,
Which dwarfs the unit—me—to insignificance!
Halt you, I stop forthwith,—proceed, I too advance!"

LXXVII.

Ay, that 's the way to take with men you wish to lead,
Instruct and benefit. Small prospect you succeed
With women so! Be all that 's great and good and wise,
August, sublime—swell out your frog the right ox-size—
He 's buoyed like a balloon, to soar, not burst, you 'll see!
The more you prove yourself, less fear the prize will flee
The captor. Here you start after no pompous stag
Who condescends be snared, with toss of horn, and brag
Of bray, and ramp of hoof; you have not to subdue
The foe through letting him imagine he snares you!
'T is rather with . . .

LXXVIII.

Ah, thanks! quick—where the dipping disk
Shows red against the rise and fall o' the fin! there frisk
In shoal the—porpoises? Dolphins, they shall and must
Cut through the freshening clear—dolphins, my instance
just!
'T is fable, therefore truth: who has to do with these,
Needs never practise trick of going hands and knees
As beasts require. Art fain the fish to captivate?
Gather thy greatness round, Arion! Stand in state,
As when the banqueting thrilled conscious—like a rose
Throughout its hundred leaves at that approach it knows

Of music in the bird—while Corinth grew one breast
A-throb for song and thee; nay, Periander pressed
The Methymnæan hand, and felt a king indeed, and guessed
How Phœbus' self might give that great mouth of the gods
Such a magnificence of song! The pillar nods,
Rocks roof, and trembles door, gigantic, post and jamb,
As harp and voice rend air—the shattering dithyramb!
So stand thou, and assume the robe that tingles yet
With triumph; strike the harp, whose every golden fret
Still smoulders with the flame, was late at fingers' end—
So, standing on the bench o' the ship, let voice expend
Thy soul, sing, unalloyed by meaner mode, thine own,
The Orthian lay; then leap from music's lofty throne,
Into the lowest surge, make fearlessly thy launch!
Whatever storm may threat, some dolphin will be staunch!
Whatever roughness rage, some exquisite sea-thing
Will surely rise to save, will bear—palpitating—
One proud humility of love beneath its load—
Stem tide, part wave, till both roll on, thy jewell'd road
Of triumph, and the grim o' the gulph grow wonder-white
I' the phosphorescent wake; and still the exquisite
Sea-thing stems on, saves still, palpitatingly thus,
Lands safe at length its load of love at Tænarus,
True woman-creature!

LXXIX.

Man? Ah, would you prove what power
Marks man,—what fruit his tree may yield, beyond the sour
And stinted crab, he calls love-apple, which remains
After you toil and moil your utmost,—all, love gains
By lavishing manure?—try quite the other plan!
And, to obtain the strong true product of a man,
Set him to hate a little! Leave cherishing his root,
And rather prune his branch, nip off the pettiest shoot
Superfluous on his bough! I promise, you shall learn
By what grace came the goat, of all beasts else, to earn
Such favour with the god o' the grape: 't was only he
Who, browsing on its tops, first stung fertility
Into the stock's heart, stayed much growth of tendril-twine,
Some faintish flower, perhaps, but gained the indignant wine,
Wrath of the red press! Catch the puniest of the kind—
Man-animalcule, starved body, stunted mind,
And, as you nip the blotch 'twixt thumb and finger-nail,
Admire how heaven above and earth below avail
No jot to soothe the mite, sore at God's prime offence
In making mites at all,—coax from its impotence

One virile drop of thought, or word, or deed, by strain
To propagate for once—which nature rendered vain,
Who lets first failure stay, yet cares not to record
Mistake that seems to cast opprobrium on the Lord!
Such were the gain from love's best pains! But let the elf
Be touched with hate, because some real man bears himself
Manlike in body and soul, and, since he lives, must thwart
And furify and set a-fizz this counterpart
O' the pismire that 's surprised to effervescence, if,
By chance, black bottle come in contact with chalk cliff,
Acid with alkali! Then thrice the bulk, out blows
Our insect, does its kind, and cuckoo-spits some rose!

LXXX.

No—'t is ungainly work, the ruling men, at best!
The graceful instinct 's right: 't is women stand confessed
Auxiliary, the gain that never goes away,
Takes nothing and gives all: Elvire, Fifine, 't is they
Convince,—if little, much, no matter!—one degree
The more, at least, convince unreasonable me
That I am, anyhow, a truth, though all else seem
And be not: if I dream, at least I know I dream.

The falsity, beside, is fleeting: I can stand
Still, and let truth come back,—your steadying touch of hand
Assists me to remain self-centred, fixed amid
All on the move. Believe in me, at once you bid
Myself believe that, since one soul has disengaged
Mine from the shows of things, so much is fact: I waged
No foolish warfare, then, with shades, myself a shade,
Here in the world—may hope my pains will be repaid!
How false things are, I judge: how changeable, I learn
When, where and how it is I shall see truth return,
That I expect to know, because Fifine knows me!—
How much more, if Elvire!

LXXXI.

"And why not, only she?
Since there can be for each, one Best, no more, such Best,
For body and mind of him, abolishes the rest
O' the simply Good and Better. You please select Elvire
To give you this belief in truth, dispel the fear
Yourself are, after all, as false as what surrounds;
And why not be content? When we two watched the rounds
The boatman made, 'twixt shoal and sandbank, yesterday,
As, at dead slack of tide, he chose to push his way,

With oar and pole, across the creek, and reach the isle
After a world of pains—my word provoked your smile,
Yet none the less deserved reply: 'T were wiser wait
'The turn o' the tide, and find conveyance for his freight—
'How easily—within the ship to purpose moored,
'Managed by sails, not oars! But no,—the man 's allured
'By liking for the new and hard in his exploit!
'First come shall serve! He makes,—courageous and adroit,—
'The merest willow-leaf of boat do duty, bear
'His merchandise across: once over, needs he care
'If folk arrive by ship, six hours hence, fresh and gay?'
No: he scorns commonplace, affects the unusual way;
And good Elvire is moored, with not a breath to flap
The yards of her, no lift of ripple to o'erlap
Keel, much less, prow. What care? since here 's a cockle-shell,
Fifine, that 's taut and crank, and carries just as well
Such seamanship as yours!"

LXXXII.

Alack, our life is lent,
From first to last, the whole, for this experiment

Of proving what I say—that we ourselves are true!
I would there were one voyage, and then no more to do
But tread the firmland, tempt the uncertain sea no more.
I would we might dispense with change of shore for shore
To evidence our skill, demonstrate—in no dream
It was, we tided o'er the trouble of the stream.
I would the steady voyage, and not the fitful trip,—
Elvire, and not Fifine,—might test our seamanship.
But why expend one's breath to tell you, change of boat
Means change of tactics too? Come see the same afloat
To-morrow, all the change, new stowage fore and aft
O' the cargo; then, to cross requires new sailor-craft!
To-day, one step from stern to bow keeps boat in trim:
To-morrow, some big stone,—or woe to boat and him!—
Must ballast both. That man stands for Mind, paramount
Throughout the adventure: ay, howe'er you make account,
'T is mind that navigates,—skips over, twists between
The bales i' the boat,—now gives importance to the mean,
And now abates the pride of life, accepts all fact,
Discards all fiction,—steers Fifine, and cries, i' the act,
"Thou art so bad, and yet so delicate a brown!
Wouldst tell no end of lies: I talk to smile or frown!
Wouldst rob me: do men blame a squirrel, lithe and sly,
For pilfering the nut she adds to hoard? Nor I.

Elvire is true, as truth, honesty's self, alack!
The worse! too safe the ship, the transport there and back
Too certain! one may loll and lounge and leave the helm,
Let wind and tide do work: no fear that waves o'erwhelm
The steady-going bark, as sure to feel her way
Blindfold across, reach land, next year as yesterday!
How can I but suspect, the true feat were to slip
Down side, transfer myself to cockle-shell from ship,
And try if, trusting to sea-tracklessness, I class
With those around whose breast grew oak and triple brass:
Who dreaded no degree of death, but, with dry eyes,
Surveyed the turgid main and its monstrosities—
And rendered futile so, the prudent Power's decree
Of separate earth and disassociating sea;
Since, how is it observed, if impious vessels leap
Across, and tempt a thing they should not touch—the deep?
(See Horace to the boat, wherein, for Athens bound,
When Virgil must embark—Jove keep him safe and sound!—
The poet bade his friend start on the watery road,
Much re-assured by this so comfortable ode.)

LXXXIII.

Then, never grudge my poor Fifine her compliment!
The rakish craft could slip her moorings in the tent,
And, hoisting every stitch of spangled canvas, steer
Through divers rocks and shoals,—in fine, deposit here
Your Virgil of a spouse, in Attica: yea, thrid
The mob of men, select the special virtue hid
In him, forsooth, and say—or rather, smile so sweet,
"Of all the multitude, you—I prefer to cheat!
Are you for Athens bound? I can perform the trip,
Shove little pinnace off, while yon superior ship,
The Elvire, refits in port!" So, off we push from beach
Of Pornic town, and lo, ere eye can wink, we reach
The Long Walls, and I prove that Athens is no dream,
For there the temples rise! they are, they nowise seem!
Earth is not all one lie, this truth attests me true!
Thanks therefore to Fifine! Elvire, I 'm back with you!
Share in the memories! Embark I trust we shall
Together some fine day, and so, for good and all,
Bid Pornic Town adieu,—then, just the strait to cross,
And we reach harbour, safe, in Iostephanos!

LXXXIV.

How quickly night comes! Lo, already 't is the land
Turns sea-like; overcrept by grey, the plains expand,

Assume significance; while ocean dwindles, shrinks
Into a pettier bound: its plash and plaint, methinks,
Six steps away, how both retire, as if their part
Were played, another force were free to prove her art,
Protagonist in turn! Are you unterrified?
All false, all fleeting too! And nowhere things abide,
And everywhere we strain that things should stay,—the one
Truth, that ourselves are true!

LXXXV.

A word, and I have done.
Is it not just our hate of falsehood, fleetingness,
And the mere part, things play, that constitutes express
The inmost charm of this Fifine and all her tribe?
Actors! We also act, but only they inscribe
Their style and title so, and preface, only they,
Performance with "A lie is all we do or say."
Wherein but there can be the attraction, Falsehood's bribe,
That wins so surely o'er to Fifine and her tribe
The liking, nay the love of who hate Falsehood most,
Except that these alone of mankind make their boast
"Frankly, we simulate!" To feign, means—to have grace
And so get gratitude! This ruler of the race,

Crowned, sceptred, stoled to suit,—'t is not that you detect
The cobbler in the king, but that he makes effect
By seeming the reverse of what you know to be
The man, the mind, whole form, fashion and quality.
Mistake his false for true, one minute,—there 's an end
Of the admiration ! Truth, we grieve at or rejoice :
'T is only falsehood, plain in gesture, look and voice,
That brings the praise desired, since profit comes thereby.
The histrionic truth is in the natural lie.
Because the man who wept the tears was, all the time,
Happy enough ; because the other man, a-grime
With guilt, was, at the least, as white as I and you ;
Because the timid type of bashful maidhood, who
Starts at her own pure shade, already numbers seven
Born babes and, in a month, will turn their odd to even ;
Because the saucy prince would prove, could you unfurl
Some yards of wrap, a meek and meritorious girl—
Precisely as you see success attained by each
O' the mimes, do you approve, not foolishly impeach
The falsehood !

LXXXVI.

That 's the first o' the truths found : all things, slow
Or quick i' the passage, come at last to that, you know !
Each has a false outside, whereby a truth is forced
To issue from within : truth, falsehood, are divorced

By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment. Life means—learning to abhor
The false, and love the true, truth treasured snatch by snatch,
Waifs counted at their worth. And when with strays they match
I' the parti-coloured world,—when, under foul, shines fair,
And truth, displayed i' the point, flashes forth everywhere
I' the circle, manifest to soul, though hid from sense,
And no obstruction more affects this confidence,—
When faith is ripe for sight,—why, reasonably, then
Comes the great clearing-up. Wait threescore years and ten!

LXXXVII.

Therefore I prize stage-play, the honest cheating; thence
The impulse pricked, when fife and drum bade Fair commence,
To bid you trip and skip, link arm in arm with me,
Like husband and like wife, and so together see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.
And if I started thence upon abstruser themes . . .
Well, 't was a dream, pricked too!

LXXXVIII.

A poet never dreams:
We prose-folk always do: we miss the proper duct
For thoughts on things unseen, which stagnate and obstruct
The system, therefore; mind, sound in a body sane,
Keeps thoughts apart from facts, and to one flowing vein
Confines its sense of that which is not, but might be,
And leaves the rest alone. What ghosts do poets see?
What dæmons fear? what man or thing misapprehend?
Unchoked, the channel 's flush, the fancy 's free to spend
Its special self aright in manner, time and place.
Never believe that who create the busy race
O' the brain, bring poetry to birth, such act performed,
Feel trouble them, the same, such residue as warmed
My prosy blood, this morn,—intrusive fancies, meant
For outbreak and escape by quite another vent!
Whence follows that, asleep, my dreamings oft exceed
The bound. But you shall hear.

LXXXIX.

I smoked. The webs o' the weed,
With many a break i' the mesh, were floating to re-form
Cupola-wise above: chased thither by soft warm

Inflow of air without; since I—of mind to muse, to clench
The gain of soul and body, got by their noon-day drench
In sun and sea,—had flung both frames o' the window wide,
To soak my body still and let soul soar beside.
In came the country sounds and sights and smells—that fine
Sharp needle in the nose from our fermenting wine!
In came a dragon-fly with whir and stir, then out,
Off and away: in came,—kept coming, rather,—pout
Succeeding smile, and take-away still close on give,—
One loose long creeper-branch, tremblingly sensitive
To risks which blooms and leaves,—each leaf tongue-broad, each bloom
Mid-finger-deep,—must run by prying in the room
Of one who loves and grasps and spoils and speculates.
All so far plain enough to sight and sense: but, weights,
Measures and numbers,—ah, could one apply such test
To other visitants that came at no request
Of who kept open house,—to fancies manifold
From this four-cornered world, the memories new and old,
The antenatal prime experience—what know I?—
The initiatory love preparing us to die—

Such were a crowd to count, a sight to see, a prize
To turn to profit, were but fleshly ears and eyes
Able to cope with those o' the spirit!

XC.

Therefore,—since
Thought hankers after speech, while no speech may evince
Feeling like music,—mine, o'erburthened with each gift
From every visitant, at last resolved to shift
Its burthen to the back of some musician dead
And gone, who feeling once what I feel now, instead
Of words, sought sounds, and saved for ever, in the same,
Truth that escapes prose,—nay, puts poetry to shame.
I read the note, I strike the key, I bid *record*
The instrument—thanks greet the veritable word!
And not in vain I urge: "O dead and gone away,
Assist who struggles yet, thy strength become my stay,
Thy record serve as well to register—I felt
And knew thus much of truth! With me, must knowledge melt
Into surmise and doubt and disbelief, unless
Thy music reassure—I gave no idle guess,
But gained a certitude I yet may hardly keep!
What care? since round is piled a monumental heap

Of music that conserves the assurance, thou as well
Wast certain of the same! thou, master of the spell,
Mad'st moonbeams marble, didst *record* what other men
Feel only to forget!" Who was it helped me, then?
What master's work first came responsive to my call,
Found my eye, fixed my choice?

XCI.

Why, Schumann's "Carnival!"
My choice chimed in, you see, exactly with the sounds
And sights of yestereve when, going on my rounds,
Where both roads join the bridge, I heard across the dusk
Creak a slow caravan, and saw arrive the husk
O' the spice-nut, which peeled off this morning, and displayed,
'Twixt tree and tree, a tent whence the red pennon made
Its vivid reach for home and ocean-idleness—
And where, my heart surmised, at that same moment,—yes,—
Tugging her *tricot* on,—yet tenderly, lest stitch
Announce the crack of doom, reveal disaster which
Our Pornic's modest stock of merceries in vain
Were ransacked to retrieve,—there, cautiously a-strain,

(My heart surmised) must crouch in that tent's corner, curved
Like Spring-month's russet moon, some girl by fate reserved
To give me once again the electric snap and spark
Which prove, when finger finds out finger in the dark
O' the world, there 's fire and life and truth there, link but hands
And pass the secret on. Lo, link by link, expands
The circle, lengthens out the chain, till one embrace
Of high with low is found uniting the whole race,
Not simply you and me and our Fifine, but all
The world: the Fair expands into the Carnival,
And Carnival again to . . . ah, but that 's my dream!

XCII.

I somehow played the piece: remarked on each old theme
I' the new dress; saw how food o' the soul, the stuff that 's made
To furnish man with thought and feeling, is purveyed
Substantially the same from age to age, with change
Of the outside only for successive feasters. Range
The banquet-room o' the world, from the dim farthest head
O' the table, to its foot, for you and me bespread,

This merry morn, we find sufficient fare, I trow.
But, novel? Scrape away the sauce; and taste, below,
The verity o' the viand,—you shall perceive there went
To board-head just the dish which other condiment
Makes palatable now: guests came, sat down, fell-to,
Rose up, wiped mouth, went way,—lived, died,—and never knew
That generations yet should, seeking sustenance,
Still find the selfsame fare, with somewhat to enhance
Its flavour, in the kind of cooking. As with hates
And loves and fears and hopes, so with what emulates
The same, expresses hates, loves, fears and hopes in Art:
The forms, the themes—no one without its counterpart
Ages ago; no one but, mumbled the due time
I' the mouth of the eater, needs be cooked again in rhyme,
Dished up anew in paint, sauce-smothered fresh in sound,
To suit the wisdom-tooth, just cut, of the age, that 's found
With gums obtuse to gust and smack which relished so
The meat o' the meal folk made some fifty years ago.
But don't suppose the new was able to efface
The old without a struggle, a pang! The commonplace
Still clung about his heart, long after all the rest
O' the natural man, at eye and ear, was caught, confessed

The charm of change, although wry lip and wrinkled nose
Owned ancient virtue more conducive to repose
Than modern nothings roused to somethings by some shred
Of pungency, perchance garlic in amber's stead.
And so on, till one day, another age, by due
Rotation, pries, sniffs, smacks, discovers old is new,
And sauce, our sires pronounced insipid, proves again
Sole piquant, may resume its titillating reign—
With music, most of all the arts, since change is there
The law, and not the lapse: the precious means the rare,
And not the absolute in all good save surprise.
So I remarked upon our Schumann's victories
Over the commonplace, how faded phrase grew fine,
And palled perfection—piqued, upstartled by that brine,
His pickle—bit the mouth and burnt the tongue aright,
Beyond the merely good no longer exquisite:
Then took things as I found, and thanked without demur
The pretty piece—played through that movement, you prefer,
Where dance and shuffle past,—he scolding while she pouts,
She canting while he calms,—in those eternal bouts
Of age, the dog—with youth, the cat—by rose-festoon
Tied teasingly enough—Columbine, Pantaloon:

She, toe-tips and *staccato,—legato* shakes his poll
And shambles in pursuit, the senior. *Fi la folle!*
Lie to him! get his gold and pay its price! begin
Your trade betimes, nor wait till you 've wed Harlequin
And need, at the week's end, to play the duteous wife,
And swear you still love slaps and leapings more than life!
Pretty! I say.

XCIII.

And so, I somehow-nohow played
The whole o' the pretty piece; and then . . . whatever weighed
My eyes down, furled the films about my wits? suppose,
The morning-bath,—the sweet monotony of those
Three keys, flat, flat and flat, never a sharp at all,—
Or else the brain's fatigue, forced even here to fall
Into the same old track, and recognize the shift
From old to new, and back to old again, and,—swift
Or slow, no matter,—still the certainty of change,
Conviction we shall find the false, where'er we range,
In art no less than nature: or what if wrist were numb,
And over-tense the muscle, abductor of the thumb,
Taxed by those tenths' and twelfths' unconscionable stretch?
Howe'er it came to pass, I soon was far to fetch—
Gone off in company with Music!

XCIV.

Whither bound
Except for Venice? She it was, by instinct found
Carnival-country proper, who far below the perch
Where I was pinnacled, showed, opposite, Mark's Church,
And, underneath, Mark's Square, with those two lines of street,
Procuratiè-sides, each leading to my feet—
Since from above I gazed, however I got there.

XCV.

And what I gazed upon was a prodigious Fair,
Concourse immense of men and women, crowned or casqued,
Turbaned or tiar'd, wreathed, plumed, hatted or wigged, but masked—
Always masked,—only, how? No face-shape, beast or bird,
Nay, fish and reptile even, but someone had preferred,
From out its frontispiece, feathered or scaled or curled,
To make the vizard whence himself should view the world,
And where the world believed himself was manifest.
Yet when you came to look, mixed up among the rest

More funnily by far, were masks to imitate
Humanity's mishap: the wrinkled brow, bald pate
And rheumy eyes of Age, peak'd chin and parchment chap,
Were signs of day-work done, and wage-time near,—mishap
Merely; but, Age reduced to simple greed and guile,
Worn apathetic else as some smooth slab, erewhile
A clear-cut man-at-arms i' the pavement, till foot's tread
Effaced the sculpture, left the stone you saw instead,—
Was not that terrible beyond the mere uncouth?
Well, and perhaps the next revolting you was Youth,
Stark ignorance and crude conceit, half smirk, half stare
On that frank fool-face, gay beneath its head of hair
Which covers nothing.

XCVI.

These, you are to understand,
Were the mere hard and sharp distinctions. On each hand,
I soon became aware, flocked the infinitude
Of passions, loves and hates, man pampers till his mood
Becomes himself, the whole sole face we name him by,
Nor want denotement else, if age or youth supply

The rest of him: old, young,—classed creature: in the main
A love, a hate, a hope, a fear, each soul a-strain
Some one way through the flesh—the face, an evidence
O' the soul at work inside; and, all the more intense,
So much the more grotesque.

XCVII.

"Why should each soul be tasked
Some one way, by one love or else one hate?" I asked.
When it occurred to me, from all these sights beneath
There rose not any sound: a crowd, yet dumb as death!

XCVIII.

Soon I knew why. (Propose a riddle, and 't is solved
Forthwith—in dream!) They spoke; but,—since on me devolved
To see, and understand by sight,—the vulgar speech
Might be dispensed with. "He who cannot see, must reach
As best he may the truth of men by help of words
They please to speak, must fare at will of who affords
The banquet,"—so I thought. "Who sees not, hears and so
Gets to believe; myself it is that, seeing, know,

And, knowing, can dispense with voice and vanity
Of speech. What hinders then, that, drawing closer, I
Put privilege to use, see and know better still
These *simulacra*, taste the profit of my skill,
Down in the midst?"

XCIX.

And plumb I pitched into the square—
A groundling like the rest. What think you happened there?
Precise the contrary of what one would expect!
For,—whereas so much more monstrosities deflect
From nature and the type, as you the more approach
Their precinct,—here, I found brutality encroach
Less on the human, lie the lightlier as I looked
The nearlier on these faces that seemed but now so crook'd
And clawed away from God's prime purpose. They diverged
A little from the type, but somehow rather urged
To pity than disgust: the prominent, before,
Now dwindled into mere distinctness, nothing more.
Still, at first sight, stood forth undoubtedly the fact
Some deviation was: in no one case there lacked
The certain sign and mark,—say hint, say, trick of lip
Or twist of nose,—that proved a fault in workmanship,

Change in the prime design, some hesitancy here
And there, which checked the man and let the beast
appear;
But that was all.

C.

All: yet enough to bid each tongue
Lie in abeyance still. They talked, themselves among,
Of themselves, to themselves; I saw the mouths at play,
The gesture that enforced, the eye that strove to say
The same thing as the voice, and seldom gained its point
—That this was so, I saw; but all seemed out of joint
I' the vocal medium 'twixt the world and me. I gained
Knowledge by notice, not by giving ear,—attained
To truth by what men seemed, not said: to me one
glance
Was worth whole histories of noisy utterance,
—At least, to me in dream.

CI.

And presently I found
That, just as ugliness had withered, so unwound
Itself, and perished off, repugnance to what wrong
Might linger yet i' the make of man. My will was strong
I' the matter; I could pick and choose, project my weight:
(Remember how we saw the boatman trim his freight!)

Determine to observe, or manage to escape,
Or make divergency assume another shape
By shift of point of sight in me the observer: thus
Corrected, added to, subtracted from,—discuss
Each variant quality, and brute-beast touch was turned
Into mankind's safeguard! Force, guile, were arms which earned
My praise, not blame at all: for we must learn to live,
Case-hardened at all points, not bare and sensitive,
But plated for defence, nay, furnished for attack,
With spikes at the due place, that neither front nor back
May suffer in that squeeze with nature, we find—life.
Are we not here to learn the good of peace through strife,
Of love through hate, and reach knowledge by ignorance?
Why, those are helps thereto, which late we eyed askance,
And nicknamed unaware! Just so, a sword we call
Superfluous, and cry out against, at festival:
Wear it in time of war, its clink and clatter grate
O' the ear to purpose then!

CII.

I found, one must abate
One's scorn of the soul's casing, distinct from the soul's self—
Which is the centre-drop: whereas the pride in pelf,

The lust to seem the thing it cannot be, the greed
For praise, and all the rest seen outside,—these indeed
Are the hard polished cold crystal environment
Of those strange orbs unearthed i' the Druid temple, meant
For divination (so the learned please to think)
Wherein you may admire one dew-drop roll and wink,
All unaffected by—quite alien to—what sealed
And saved it long ago: though how it got congealed
I shall not give a guess, nor how, by power occult,
The solid surface-shield was outcome and result
Of simple dew at work to save itself amid
The unwatery force around; protected thus, dew slid
Safe through all opposites, impatient to absorb
Its spot of life, and last for ever in the orb
We, now, from hand to hand pass with impunity.

CIII.

And the delight wherewith I watch this crowd must be
Akin to that which crowns the chemist when he winds
Thread up and up, till clue be fairly clutched,—unbinds
The composite, ties fast the simple to its mate,
And, tracing each effect back to its cause, elate,
Constructs in fancy, from the fewest primitives,
The complex and complete, all diverse life, that lives

Not only in beast, bird, fish, reptile, insect, but
The very plants and earths and ores. Just so I glut
My hunger both to be and know the thing I am,
By contrast with the thing I am not; so, through sham
And outside, I arrive at inmost real, probe
And prove how the nude form obtained the chequered
robe.

CIV.

—Experience, I am glad to master soon or late,
Here, there and everywhere i' the world, without debate!
Only, in Venice why? What reason for Mark's Square
Rather than Timbuctoo?

CV.

And I became aware,
Scarcely the word escaped my lips, that swift ensued
In silence and by stealth, and yet with certitude,
A formidable change of the amphitheatre
Which held the Carnival; although the human stir
Continued just the same amid that shift of scene.

CVI.

For as on edifice of cloud i' the grey and green
Of evening,—built about some glory of the west,
To barricade the sun's departure,—manifest,
He plays, pre-eminently gold, gilds vapour, crag and crest

Which bend in rapt suspense above the act and deed
They cluster round and keep their very own, nor heed
The world at watch; while we, breathlessly at the base
O' the castellated bulk, note momently the mace
Of night fall here, fall there, bring change with every blow,
Alike to sharpened shaft and broadened portico
I' the structure: heights and depths, beneath the leaden stress,
Crumble and melt and mix together, coälesce
Re-form, but sadder still, subdued yet more and more
By every fresh defeat, till wearied eyes need pore
No longer on the dull impoverished decadence
Of all that pomp of pile in towering evidence
So lately:—

CVII.

Even thus nor otherwise, meseemed
That if I fixed my gaze awhile on what I dreamed
Was Venice' Square, Mark's Church, the scheme was straight unschemed,
A subtle something had its way within the heart
Of each and every house I watched, with counterpart
Of tremor through the front and outward face, until
Mutation was at end; impassive and stock-still

Stood now the ancient house, grown—new, is scarce the
phrase,
Since older, in a sense,—altered to . . . what i' the ways,
Ourselves are wont to see, coërced by city, town
Or village, anywhere i' the world, pace up or down
Europe ! In all the maze, no single tenement
I saw, but I could claim acquaintance with.

CVIII.

There went
Conviction to my soul, that what I took of late
For Venice was the world; its Carnival—the state
Of mankind, masquerade in life-long permanence
For all time, and no one particular feast-day. Whence
'T was easy to infer what meant my late disgust
At the brute-pageant, each grotesque of greed and lust
And idle hate, and love as impotent for good—
When from my pride of place I passed the interlude
In critical review; and what, the wonder that ensued
When, from such pinnacled pre-eminence, I found
Somehow the proper goal for wisdom was the ground
And not the sky,—so, slid sagaciously betimes
Down heaven's baluster-rope, to reach the mob of mimes
And mummers; whereby came discovery there was just
Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed and lust,

Could one discerningly but hold the balance, shift
The weight from scale to scale, do justice to the drift
Of nature, and explain the glories by the shames
Mixed up in man, one stuff miscalled by different names
According to what stage i' the process turned his rough,
Even as I gazed, to smooth—only get close enough!
—What was all this except the lesson of a life?

CIX.

And—consequent upon the learning how from strife
Grew peace—from evil, good—came knowledge that, to get
Acquaintance with the way o' the world, we must nor fret
Nor fume, on altitudes of self-sufficiency,
But bid a frank farewell to what—we think—should be,
And, with as good a grace, welcome what is—we find.

CX.

Is—for the hour, observe! Since something to my mind
Suggested soon the fancy, nay, certitude that change,
Never suspending touch, continued to derange
What architecture, we, walled up within the cirque
O' the world, consider fixed as fate, not fairy-work.

For those were temples, sure, which tremblingly grew
blank
From bright, then broke afresh in triumph,—ah, but sank
As soon, for liquid change through artery and vein
O' the very marble wound its way! And first a stain
Would startle and offend amid the glory; next,
Spot swift succeeded spot, but found me less perplexed
By portents; then as 't were a sleepiness soft stole
Over the stately fane, and shadow sucked the whole
Façade into itself, made uniformly earth
What was a piece of heaven; till, lo, a second birth,
And the veil broke away because of something new
Inside, that pushed to gain an outlet, paused in view
At last, and proved a growth of stone or brick or wood
Which, alien to the aim o' the Builder, somehow stood
The test, could satisfy, if not the early race
For whom he built, at least our present populace,
Who must not bear the blame for what, blamed, proves
mishap
Of the Artist: his work gone, another fills the gap,
Serves the prime purpose so. Undoubtedly there spreads
Building around, above, which makes men lift their heads
To look at, or look through, or look—for aught I care—
Over: if only up, it is, not down, they stare,
"Commercing with the skies," and not the pavement in
the Square.

CXI.

But are they only temples that subdivide, collapse,
And tower again, transformed? Academies, perhaps!
Domes where dwells Learning, seats of Science, bower and hall
Which house Philosophy—do these, too, rise and fall,
Based though foundations be on steadfast mother-earth,
With no chimeric claim to supermundane birth,
No boast that, dropped from cloud, they did not grow from ground?
Why, these fare worst of all! these vanish and are found
Nowhere, by who tasks eye some twice within his term
Of threescore years and ten, for tidings what each germ
Has burgeoned out into, whereof the promise stunned
His ear with such acclaim,—praise-payment to refund
The praisers, never doubt, some twice before they die
Whose days are long i' the land.

CXII.

Alack, Philosophy!
Despite the chop and change, diminished or increased,
Patched-up and plastered-o'er, Religion stands at least
I' the temple-type. But thou? Here gape I, all agog
These thirty years, to learn how tadpole turns to frog;

And thrice at least have gazed with mild astonishment,
As, skyward up and up, some fire-new fabric sent
Its challenge to mankind that, clustered underneath
To hear the word, they straight believe, ay, in the teeth
O' the Past, clap hands and hail triumphant Truth's out-
break—
Tadpole-frog-theory propounded past mistake!
In vain! A something ails the edifice, it bends,
It bows, it buries . . . Haste! cry "Heads below" to
friends—
But have no fear they find, when smother shall subside,
Some substitution perk with unabated pride
I' the predecessor's place!

CXIII.

No,—the one voice which failed
Never, the preachment's coign of vantage nothing
ailed,—
That had the luck to lodge i' the house not made with
hands!
And all it preached was this: "Truth builds upon the
sands,
Though stationed on a rock: and so her work decays,
And so she builds afresh, with like result. Nought
stays

But just the fact that Truth not only is, but fain
Would have men know she needs must be, by each so plain
Attempt to visibly inhabit where they dwell."
Her works are work, while she is she; that work does well
Which lasts mankind their life-time through, and lets believe
One generation more, that, though sand run through sieve,
Yet earth now reached is rock, and what we moderns find
Erected here is Truth, who, 'stablished to her mind
I' the fulness of the days, will never change in show
More than in substance erst: men thought they knew; we know!

CXIV.

Do you, my generation? Well, let the blocks prove mist
I' the main enclosure,—church and college, if they list,
Be something for a time, and everything anon,
And anything awhile, as fit is off or on,
Till they grow nothing, soon to re-appear no less
As something,—shape re-shaped, till out of shapelessness
Come shape again as sure! no doubt, or round or square
Or polygon its front, some building will be there,

Do duty in that nook o' the wall o' the world where once
The Architect saw fit precisely to ensconce
College or church, and bid such bulwark guard the line
O' the barrier round about, humanity's confine.

CXV.

Leave watching change at work i' the greater scale, on these
The main supports, and turn to their interstices
Filled up by fabrics too, less costly and less rare,
Yet of importance, yet essential to the Fair
They help to circumscribe, instruct and regulate!
See, where each booth-front boasts, in letters small or great,
Its specialty, proclaims its privilege to stop
A breach, beside the best!

CXVI.

Here History keeps shop,
Tells how past deeds were done, so and not otherwise:
"Man! hold truth evermore! forget the early lies!"
There sits Morality, demure behind her stall,
Dealing out life and death: "This is the thing to call
Right, and this other, wrong; thus think, thus do, thus say,
Thus joy, thus suffer!—not to-day as yesterday—

Yesterday's doctrine dead, this only shall endure!
Obey its voice and live!"—enjoins the dame demure.
While Art gives flag to breeze, bids drum beat, trumpet
blow,
Inviting eye and ear to yonder raree-show.
Up goes the canvas, hauled to height of pole. I think,
We know the way—long lost, late learned—to paint!
A wink
Of eye, and lo, the pose! the statue on its plinth!
How could we moderns miss the heart o' the labyrinth
Perversely all these years, permit the Greek seclude
His secret till to-day? And here 's another feud
Now happily composed: inspect this quartett-score!
Got long past melody, no word has Music more
To say to mortal man! But is the bard to be
Behindhand? Here 's his book, and now perhaps you see
At length what poetry can do!

CXVII.

Why, that 's stability
Itself, that change on change we sorrowfully saw
Creep o'er the prouder piles! We acquiesced in law
When the fine gold grew dim i' the temple, when the brass
Which pillared that so brave abode where Knowledge was,
Bowed and resigned the trust; but, bear all this caprice,
Harlequinade where swift to birth succeeds decease

Of hue at every turn o' the tinsel-flag which flames
While Art holds booth in Fair? Such glories chased by shames
Like these, distract beyond the solemn and august
Procedure to decay, evanishment in dust,
Of those marmoreal domes,—above vicissitude,
We used to hope!

CXVIII.

"So, all is change, in fine," pursued
The preachment to a pause. When—"All is permanence!"
Returned a voice. Within? without? No matter whence
The explanation came: for, understand, I ought
To simply say—"I saw," each thing I say "I thought."
Since ever as, unrolled, the strange scene-picture grew
Before me, sight flashed first, though mental comment too
Would follow in a trice, come hobblingly to halt.

CXIX.

So, what did I see next but,—much as when the vault
I' the west,—wherein we watch the vapoury manifold
Transfiguration,—tired turns blaze to black,—behold,
Peak reconciled to base, dark ending feud with bright,
The multiform subsides, becomes the definite.

Contrasting life and strife, where battle they i' the blank
Severity of peace in death, for which we thank
One wind that comes to quell the concourse, drive at last
Things to a shape which suits the close of things, and cast
Palpably o'er vexed earth heaven's mantle of repose?

CXX.

Just so, in Venice' Square, that things were at the close
Was signalled to my sense; for I perceived arrest
O' the change all round about. As if some impulse pressed
Each gently into each, what was distinctness, late,
Grew vague, and, line from line no longer separate,
No matter what its style, edifice . . . shall I say,
Died into edifice? I find no simpler way
Of saying how, without or dash or shock or trace
Of violence, I found unity in the place
Of temple, tower,—nay, hall and house and hut,—one blank
Severity of peace in death; to which they sank
Resigned enough, till . . . ah, conjecture, I beseech,
What special blank did they agree to, all and each?
What common shape was that wherein they mutely merged
Likes and dislikes of form, so plain before?

CXXI.

I urged
Your step this way, prolonged our path of enterprise
To where we stand at last, in order that your eyes
Might see the very thing, and save my tongue describe
The Druid monument which fronts you. Could I bribe
Nature to come in aid, illustrate what I mean,
What wants there she should lend to solemnize the scene?

CXXII.

How does it strike you, this construction gaunt and grey—
Sole object, these piled stones, that gleam unground-away
By twilight's hungry jaw, which champs fine all beside
I' the solitary waste we grope through? Oh, no guide
Need we to grope our way and reach the monstrous door
Of granite! Take my word, the deeper you explore
That caverned passage, filled with fancies to the brim,
The less will you approve the adventure! such a grim
Bar-sinister soon blocks abrupt your path, and ends
All with a cold dread shape,—shape whereon Learning spends
Labour, and leaves the text obscurer for the gloss,
While Ignorance reads right—recoiling from that Cross!

Whence came the mass and mass, strange quality of
stone
Unquarried anywhere i' the region round? Unknown!
Just as unknown, how such enormity could be
Conveyed by land, or else transported over sea,
And laid in order, so, precisely each on each,
As you and I would build a grotto where the beach
Sheds shell—to last an hour: this building lasts from age
To age the same. But why?

CXXIII.

Ask Learning! I engage
You get a prosy wherefore, shall help you to advance
In knowledge just as much as helps you Ignorance
Surmising, in the mouth of peasant-lad or lass,
"I heard my father say he understood it was
A building, people built as soon as earth was made
Almost, because they might forget (they were afraid)
Earth did not make itself, but came of Somebody.
They laboured that their work might last, and show
thereby
He stays, while we and earth, and all things come and
go.
Come whence? Go whither? That, when come and
gone, we know

Perhaps, but not while earth and all things need our best
Attention: we must wait and die to know the rest.
Ask, if that 's true, what use in setting up the pile?
To make one fear and hope: remind us, all the while
We come and go, outside there 's Somebody that stays;
A circumstance which ought to make us mind our ways,
Because,—whatever end we answer by this life,—
Next time, best chance must be for who, with toil and strife,
Manages now to live most like what he was meant
Become: since who succeeds so far, 't is evident,
Stands foremost on the file; who fails, has less to hope
From new promotion. That 's the rule—with even a rope
Of mushrooms, like this rope I dangle! those that grew
Greatest and roundest, all in life they had to do,
Gain a reward, a grace they never dreamed, I think;
Since, outside white as milk and inside black as ink,
They go to the Great House to make a dainty dish
For Don and Donna; while this basket-load, I wish
Well off my arm, it breaks,—no starveling of the heap
But had his share of dew, his proper length of sleep
I' the sunshine: yet, of all, the outcome is—this queer
Cribbed quantity of dwarfs which burthen basket here
Till I reach home; 't is there that, having run their rigs,
They end their earthly race, are flung as food for pigs.

Any more use I see? Well, you must know, there lies
Something, the Curé says, that points to mysteries
Above our grasp: a huge stone pillar, once upright,
Now laid at length, half-lost—discreetly shunning sight
I' the bush and briar, because of stories in the air—
Hints what it signified, and why was stationed there,
Once on a time. In vain the Curé tasked his lungs—
Showed, in a preachment, how, at bottom of the rungs
O' the ladder, Jacob saw, where heavenly angels stept
Up and down, lay a stone which served him, while he slept,
For pillow; when he woke, he set the same upright
As pillar, and a-top poured oil: things requisite
To instruct posterity, there mounts from floor to roof,
A staircase, earth to heaven; and also put in proof,
When we have scaled the sky, we well may let alone
What raised us from the ground, and,—paying to the stone
Proper respect, of course,—take staff and go our way,
Leaving the Pagan night for Christian break of day.
'For,' preached he, 'what they dreamed, these Pagans wide-awake
'We Christians may behold. How strange, then, were mistake
'Did anybody style the stone,—because of drop
'Remaining there from oil which Jacob poured a-top,—

'Itself the Gate of Heaven, itself the end, and not
'The means thereto!' Thus preached the Curé, and no jot
The more persuaded people but that, what once a thing
Meant and had right to mean, it still must mean. So cling
Folk somehow to the prime authoritative speech,
And so distrust report, it seems as they could reach
Far better the arch-word, whereon their fate depends,
Through rude charactery, than all the grace it lends,
That lettering of your scribes! who flourish pen apace
And ornament the text, they say—we say, efface.
Hence, when the earth began its life afresh in May,
And fruit-trees bloomed, and waves would wanton, and the bay
Ruffle its wealth of weed, and stranger-birds arrive,
And beasts take each a mate,—folk, too, found sensitive,
Surmised the old grey stone upright there, through such tracts
Of solitariness and silence, kept the facts
Entrusted it, could deal out doctrine, did it please:
No fresh and frothy draught, but liquor on the lees,
Strong, savage and sincere: first bleedings from a vine
Whereof the product now do Curés so refine
To insipidity, that, when heart sinks, we strive
And strike from the old stone the old restorative.

'Which is?'—why, go and ask our grandames how they used
To dance around it, till the Curé disabused
Their ignorance, and bade the parish in a band
Lay flat the obtrusive thing that cumbered so the land!
And there, accordingly, in bush and briar it—'bides
'Its time to rise again!' (so somebody derides,
That 's pert from Paris) 'since, yon spire, you keep erect
'Yonder, and pray beneath, is nothing, I suspect,
'But just the symbol's self, expressed in slate for rock,
'Art's smooth for Nature's rough, new chip from the old block!'
There, sir, my say is said! Thanks, and Saint Gille increase
The wealth bestowed so well!"—wherewith he pockets piece,
Doffs cap, and takes the road. I leave in Learning's clutch
More money for his book, but scarcely gain as much.

CXXIV.

To this it was, this same primæval monument,
That, in my dream, I saw building with building blent
Fall: each on each they fast and founderingly went
Confusion-ward; but thence again subsided fast,
Became the mound you see. Magnificently massed

Indeed, those mammoth-stones, piled by the Protoplast
Temple-wise in my dream! beyond compare with fanes
Which, solid-looking late, had left no least remains
I' the bald and blank, now sole usurper of the plains
Of heaven, diversified and beautiful before.
And yet simplicity appeared to speak no more
Nor less to me than spoke the compound. At the core,
One and no other word, as in the crust of late,
Whispered, which, audible through the transition-state,
Was no loud utterance in even the ultimate
Disposure. For as some imperial chord subsists,
Steadily underlies the accidental mists
Of music springing thence, that run their mazy race
Around, and sink, absorbed, back to the triad base,—
So, out of that one word, each variant rose and fell
And left the same "All 's change, but permanence as well."
—Grave note whence—list aloft!—harmonics sound, that mean:
"Truth inside, and outside, truth also; and between
Each, falsehood that is change, as truth is permanence.
The individual soul works through the shows of sense,
(Which, ever proving false, still promise to be true)
Up to an outer soul as individual too;
And, through the fleeting, lives to die into the fixed,
And reach at length 'God man, or both together mixed.'

Transparent through the flesh, by parts which prove a
whole,
By hints which make the soul discernible by soul—
Let only soul look up, not down, not hate but love,
As truth successively takes shape, one grade above
Its last presentment, tempts as it were truth indeed
Revealed this time; so tempts, till we attain to read
The signs aright, and learn, by failure, truth is forced
To manifest itself through falsehood; whence divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment, truth instructs us to abhor
The false, and prize the true, obtainable thereby.
Then do we understand the value of a lie;
Its purpose served, its truth once safe deposited,
Each lie, superfluous now, leaves, in the singer's stead,
The indubitable song; the historic personage
Put by, leaves prominent the impulse of his age;
Truth sets aside speech, act, time, place, indeed, but
brings
Nakedly forward now the principle of things
Highest and least."

CXXV.

Wherewith change ends. What
change to dread
When, disengaged at last from every veil, instead

Of type remains the truth? once—falsehood: but anon
Theosuton e broteion eper kekramenon,
Something as true as soul is true, though veils between
Prove false and fleet away. As I mean, did he mean,
The poet whose bird-phrase sits, singing in my ear
A mystery not unlike? What through the dark and dread
Brought comfort to the Titan? Emerging from the lymph,
"God, man, or mixture" proved only to be a nymph:
"From whom the clink on clink of metal" (money, judged
Abundant in my purse) "struck" (bumped at, till it budged)
"The modesty, her soul's habitual resident"
(Where late the sisterhood were lively in their tent)
"As out of wingèd car" (that caravan on wheels)
"Impulsively she rushed, no slippers to her heels,"
And "Fear not, friends we flock!" soft smiled the sea-Fifine—
Primitive of the veils (if he meant what I mean)
The poet's Titan learned to lift, ere "Three-formed Fate,
Moirai Trimorphoi" stood unmasked the Ultimate.

CXXVI.

Enough o' the dream! You see how poetry turns prose.
Announcing wonder-work, I dwindle at the close
Down to mere commonplace old facts which everybody knows.
So dreaming disappoints! The fresh and strange at first,
Soon wears to trite and tame, nor warrants the outburst
Of heart with which we hail those heights, at very brink
Of heaven, whereto one least of lifts would lead, we think,
But wherefrom quick decline conducts our step, we find,
To homely earth, old facts familiar left behind.
Did not this monument, for instance, long ago
Say all it had to say, show all it had to show,
Nor promise to do duty more in dream?

CXXVII.

Awaking so,
What if we, homeward-bound, all peace and some fatigue,
Trudge, soberly complete our tramp of near a league,
Last little mile which makes the circuit just, Elvire?
We end where we began: that consequence is clear.

All peace and some fatigue, wherever we were nursed
To life, we bosom us on death, find last is first
And thenceforth final too.

CXXVIII.

"Why final? Why the more
Worth credence now than when such truth proved false before?"
Because a novel point impresses now: each lie
Redounded to the praise of man, was victory
Man's nature had both right to get, and might to gain,
And by no means implied submission to the reign
Of other quite as real a nature, that saw fit
To have its way with man, not man his way with it.
This time, acknowledgment and acquiescence quell
Their contrary in man; promotion proves as well
Defeat: and Truth, unlike the False with Truth's outside,
Neither plumes up his will nor puffs him out with pride.
I fancy, there must lurk some cogency i' the claim,
Man, such abatement made, submits to, all the same.
Soul finds no triumph, here, to register like Sense
With whom 't is ask and have,—the want, the evidence
That the thing wanted, soon or late, will be supplied.
This indeed plumes up will; this, sure, puffs out with pride,

When, reading records right, man's instincts still attest
Promotion comes to Sense because Sense likes it best;
For bodies sprouted legs, through a desire to run:
While hands, when fain to filch, got fingers one by one,
And nature, that 's ourself, accommodative brings
To bear that, tired of legs which walk, we now bud wings
Since of a mind to fly. Such savour in the nose
Of Sense, would stimulate Soul sweetly, I suppose,
Soul with its proper itch of instinct, prompting clear
To recognize soul's self Soul's only master here
Alike from first to last. But, if time's pressure, light's
Or rather, dark's approach, wrest thoroughly the rights
Of rule away, and bid the soul submissive bear
Another soul than it play master everywhere
In great and small,—this time, I fancy, none disputes
There 's something in the fact that such conclusion suits
Nowise the pride of man, nor yet chimes in with attributes
Conspicuous in the lord of nature. He receives
And not demands—not first likes faith and then believes.

CXXIX.

And as with the last essence so with its first faint type.
Inconstancy means raw, 't is faith alone means ripe
I' the soul which runs its round: no matter how it range
From Helen to Fifine, Elvire bids back the change

To permanence. Here, too, love ends where love began.
Such ending looks like law, because the natural man
Inclines the other way, feels lordlier free than bound.
Poor pabulum for pride when the first love is found
Last also! and, so far from realizing gain,
Each step aside just proves divergency in vain.
The wanderer brings home no profit from his quest
Beyond the sad surmise that keeping house were best
Could life begin anew. His problem posed aright
Was—"From the given point evolve the infinite!"
Not—"Spend thyself in space, endeavouring to joint
Together, and so make infinite, point and point:
Fix into one Elvire a Fair-ful of Fifines!"
Fifine, the foam-flake, she: Elvire, the sea's self, means
Capacity at need to shower how many such!
And yet we left her calm profundity, to clutch
Foam-flutter, bell on bell, that, bursting at a touch,
Blistered us for our pains. But wise, we want no more
O' the fickle element. Enough of foam and roar!
Land-locked, we live and die henceforth: for here 's the
villa-door.

CXXX.

How pallidly you pause o' the threshold! Hardly night,
Which drapes you, ought to make real flesh and blood
so white!

Touch me, and so appear alive to all intents!
Will the saint vanish from the sinner that repents?
Suppose you are a ghost! A memory, a hope,
A fear, a conscience! Quick! Give back the hand I grope
I' the dusk for!

CXXXI.

That is well. Our double horoscope
I cast, while you concur. Discard that simile
O' the fickle element! Elvire is land not sea—
The solid land, the safe. All these word-bubbles came
O' the sea, and bite like salt. The unlucky bath 's to blame.
This hand of yours on heart of mine, no more the bay
I beat, nor bask beneath the blue! In Pornic, say,
The Mayor shall catalogue me duly domiciled,
Contributable, good-companion of the guild
And mystery of marriage. I stickle for the town,
And not this tower apart; because, though, half-way down,
Its mullions wink o'erwebbed with bloomy greenness, yet
Who mounts to staircase top may tempt the parapet,
And sudden there 's the sea! No memories to arouse,
No fancies to delude! Our honest civic house

Of the earth be earthy too!—or graced perchance with shell
Made prize of long ago, picked haply where the swell
Menaced a little once—or seaweed-branch that yet
Dampens and softens, notes a freak of wind, a fret
Of wave: though, why on earth should sea-change mend or mar
The calm contemplative householders that we are?
So shall the seasons fleet, while our two selves abide:
E'en past astonishment how sunrise and springtide
Could tempt one forth to swim; the more if time appoints
That swimming grow a task for one's rheumatic joints.
Such honest civic house, behold, I constitute
Our villa! Be but flesh and blood, and smile to boot!
Enter for good and all! then fate bolt fast the door,
Shut you and me inside, never to wander more!

CXXXII.

Only,—you do not use to apprehend attack!
No doubt, the way I march, one idle arm, thrown slack
Behind me, leaves the open hand defenceless at the back,
Should an impertinent on tiptoe steal, and stuff
—Whatever can it be? A letter sure enough,
Pushed betwixt palm and glove! That largess of a franc?
Perhaps inconsciously,—to better help the blank

O' the nest, her tambourine, and, laying egg, persuade
A family to follow, the nest-egg that I laid
May have contained,—but just to foil suspicious folk,—
Between two silver whites a yellow double yolk!
Oh, threaten no farewell! five minutes shall suffice
To clear the matter up. I go, and in a trice
Return; five minutes past, expect me! If in vain—
Why, slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost again!

EPILOGUE.

THE HOUSEHOLDER.

I.

Savage I was sitting in my house, late, lone:
  Dreary, weary with the long day's work:
Head of me, heart of me, stupid as a stone:
  Tongue-tied now, now blaspheming like a Turk;
When, in a moment, just a knock, call, cry,
  Half a pang and all a rapture, there again were we!—
"What, and is it really you again?" quoth I:
  "I again, what else did you expect?" quoth She.

II.

"Never mind, hie away from this old house—
  Every crumbling brick embrowned with sin and shame!
Quick, in its corners ere certain shapes arouse!
  Let them—every devil of the night—lay claim,
Make and mend, or rap and rend, for me! Good-bye!
  God be their guard from disturbance at their glee,
Till, crash, comes down the carcass in a heap!" quoth I:
  'Nay, but there 's a decency required!" quoth She.

III

"Ah, but if you knew how time has dragged, days, nights!
All the neighbour-talk with man and maid—such men!
All the fuss and trouble of street-sounds, window-sights:
All the worry of flapping door and echoing roof; and then,
All the fancies . . . Who were they had leave, dared try
Darker arts that almost struck despair in me?
If you knew but how I dwelt down here!" quoth I:
"And was I so better off up there?" quoth She.

IV.

"Help and get it over! *Re-united to his wife*
(How draw up the paper lets the parish-people know?)
Lies M., or N., departed from this life,
Day the this or that, month and year the so and so.
What i' the way of final flourish? Prose, verse? Try!
Affliction sore long time he bore, or, what is it to be?
Till God did please to grant him ease. Do end!" quoth I:
"I end with—Love is all and Death is nought!" quoth She.

END OF THE ELEVENTH VOLUME.

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

CLC Trans Vol. 11
BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 4444 04489 1034
AUG 24 2007
BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
GRAND ARMY PLAZA
BROOKLYN, N.Y. 11238

B88 P03
Browning
Poetical works